CHRISTIAN BROTHERS UNIVERSITY -- PLOUGH LIBRARY
823 B5f
Bickerstaffe-Drew, Franci 000
French windows, by John Ayscou 010101
0 1181 0021631 8

NEW SELECTED
STOCK BINDERY

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS COLLEGE LIBRARY
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

FRENCH WINDOWS

By JOHN AYSCOUGH

GRACECHURCH

Crown 8vo.

"Ayscough has never given the public so interesting and so quaint a series of studies as are embraced in this, his latest work. . . . The portraiture is intimate. . . . It is graphic. . . . It is more than a novel. . . . It is a mosaic of modern life with jewels in the setting. The vivid imagination of the author and his remarkable literary style make of it a study that is entrancing. Admirers of John Ayscough will readily grasp it and be treated to a literary repast of unexcelled merit."—*Tablet.*

MONKSBRIDGE: A Novel

Crown 8vo.

"A well-bred book, softly aglow with the tempered colors, the placid atmosphere of its period; a bit of English historical fiction."—*N. Y. Tribune.*

"Monksbridge is a continuous story, and a good one, set in the atmosphere of 'Gracechurch.' . . . all this is just a background to one striking incident that takes the book out of the worldly class and into the first rank of Catholic stories."

—*America.*

LEVIA PONDERA: An Essay Book

With Portrait. Crown 8vo.

". . . forty brilliant essays . . . a goodly book that will put the Catholic and many a non-Catholic reader, deeply in his debt."—*America.*

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO., NEW YORK

'RENCH WINDOWS

BY

JOHN AYSCOUGH

AUTHOR OF "GRACECHURCH," "LEVIA-PONDERA," "MONKSBRIDGE," ETC.

NEW EDITION

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH ST., NEW YORK
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS

823.89

F
Ays 8

Printed in the United States

February, 1918; April, 1918;
July, 1918; January, 1919
FEBRUARY, 1921

296
3229

Dedication

TO

LADY AUSTIN LEE

Dear Lady Austin Lee,

As you have over and over again, while these papers were appearing in the *Month,* spoken and written of them in terms of warm and kindly eulogy, I am venturing, now that they are reappearing as a book, to ask your permission to dedicate the volume to you.

During the latter portion of the eighteen months that I was on service with the British Expeditionary Force in France, I was within reach of the hospitality of Sir Henry Austin Lee and yourself; and I shall always remember gratefully how warm was the welcome extended to me by both of you, and how steady and untiring that hospitality was. Do you remember my reading one of these papers to you and your friends? I resolved then that, whenever they should appear as a book, I would offer it to yourself.

There is at least one reason why the slight gift should not seem also inappropriate. However inadequate as War Pictures (and, indeed, they are mostly not War Pictures at all, but little vignettes of Peace torn off the sterner page of War), they are sincere and reverent, though very humble and modest, tributes to the French

and English soldier. And that admiration and love is common ground between yourself and the writer. He has been asked whether the scenes and characters described are fruits of his imagination; and such a question is not unfairly put to one whose other works have been (with the exception of *Gracechurch*) pure fiction. But the answer is No; every episode and every character is drawn from reality and life: nothing is imaginary. That which is described is what the writer saw and heard, so far as he has been able to translate into words what eyes and ears told him.

When he wrote the earlier papers he had no idea of an extended series, or that the patience of the editor of the *Month* would stand anything of the kind; and that is one reason why the very earliest (and in many ways the most interesting) days of the war are dealt with much more hurriedly than episodes, in themselves of far less account, of a slightly later period, and the reason why many other episodes of those earliest days have been omitted altogether.

It may seem that the putting of the papers together into a book would afford a specially convenient opportunity for the filling of those gaps by the addition of new chapters, which might pretty easily be so fitted into their places as not to appear intercalary. But the author neither can nor will attempt to do that. Rightly or wrongly, it has always been his practice to publish what he has written without furbishing or addition. And were he now to turn back and pick up those dropped stitches, to himself at all events the patches would be obvious and offensive: he could not treat of those now far-away days without, in spite of himself, working into his descriptions later experiences and

feelings. As they stand, meagre enough and patchy, they are at least honest presentments of how things struck him at the moment. Added chapters, written now but dealing with the quite initial phase of the great struggle, could not fail of being tinged with later apprehensions.

The papers do not in the least pretend to be a complete detail of the experiences even of one ignorant participant: they are pictures clipped almost at haphazard out of his memory. Much is quite intentionally passed over, especially any episodes in which the writer himself bore a special part.

In the *Month* these pages bore the heading *French and English,* a title which is very reluctantly abandoned; but during their appearance it came to the writer's knowledge that another book had that name. So another title for this volume had to be chosen, and that of one of its chapters has been given to the whole.

JOHN AYSCOUGH.

*** To the Editor of the *Month* the Author offers his thanks for permission to reprint these pages.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	OBITER PICTA	1
II.	A PARENTHESIS OF WAR	12
III.	AT CROSS-WAYS	32
IV.	ENGLISH	52
V.	NEITHER	68
VI.	WAR DOGS	80
VII.	NOUGHTS AND CROSSES	94
VIII.	LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST?	119
IX.	FRENCH WINDOWS	134
X.	OBITER DICTA	154
XI.	WEST FLANDERS	173
XII.	LOVE IN A MIST	189
XIII.	SILENCE	209
XIV.	CHUTNEY'S MAJORITY	241
XV.	ON THE BRIDGE	262
XVI.	FINIS	281

FRENCH WINDOWS

I

OBITER PICTA

EVERYTHING seen became, at once to him who writes, a picture, and took the permanence of a picture, that mere action lacks. Events are transient, and only assume fixity after they have passed and taken their impregnable seat in memory. All these things seen seemed a part of memory while still before his eyes; and from first to last he never felt like a real man, looking at them, but as a man in a picture—hundreds of successive pictures, each of which was itself a palimpsest: for the first intention of each, in the Master-Painter's mind, had obviously been "Peace," only an Imperial maniac had supervened and crudely over-painted "War" on every one of them. It was only now and then that this utter aloofness of sense would yield to the vehement activity of sensation that there is in dreams, the shallowest of dreams when the

sleeper knows he is dreaming, and expects to wake, but meanwhile must be driven through the vagaries against which he protests. At those rarer times he, this reluctant dreamer of war, groped impatiently for the hand that should shake him awake and give him back the sane reality of "Peace. . . .

The first pictures were all of interminable rich corn-lands, brown-gold in a splendid harvest, endless wealth of corn that never should be worth anything. The men who had sown the wheat and cut it, who had bound it in sheaves and piled the sheaves into stooks—like rows of tents along the horizons—were all gone, and to no farmsteads would the incalculable, opulent harvest ever be carried home: for the farm-lads had gone, changed to chasseurs and dragoons ("dragons" our English fellows call them,) and the horses had gone too. So there the sheaves should stand till the rains rotted them, if they should survive the passing and re-passing of hundreds of thousands of war-men, houseless and dog-weary, who would seize them and make beds of them, or little shelter-houses against the pitiless wet, and scatter and trample them: few *would* survive it, for every field would be a camp in its turn, many taking their turn over and over again, till each frugal, rich field changed itself to a patch of mire, a parable of squalid waste.

During those early pictures it was hard to tell whether the toothed sky-line, in the breathless hot dusk, were a row of corn-stooks (like an endless war-train arrested by some block far ahead and incomprehensible to miles of waggons and men), or really a war-train like corn-stooks. Often, in the early light, when dawn was rearranging pictures out of the solid ink of night, even the near fields would seem covered with monstrous parades of hideous titanic snails, each corn-stook standing for a shell, the long, level shadows for the ugly creeping body.

The first pictures of all had WELCOME for title: even the Havre streets had that name at every corner of them, the Havre people had it in their eyes, and every smiling lip expressed it to the English soldier who could understand, then, no other word of French: "Welcome, good Englishman come to help our France at her need." We had *done* nothing yet, but we had come, against all the expectation of the Imperial calculator who had thought, "England will never go. Secure in her selfish island she will sit at home and bask in her safety like a purring cat that cares for no outward storm while her own place is warm by the hearth. England has nought to gain, and her friend's loss will never cut her."

But England had come, and more than kept

her word. Greater love no man can show than that he should lay down his life for his friend: and England had come with that supreme proof in her hand; so welcome and thanks was on every French face that looked upon the honest English faces and read there the promise stiff English tongues could not translate from fact to mere vernacular word. And very proudly French men and women carried, like valued jewels, the cap or shoulder-badges begged of the English soldier-lad as he went laughing or whistling by. Hundreds of thousands of French will keep those little trumpery, priceless gifts, heirlooms of England's fidelity, for ever in their families.

> Changed now from a toy to a relic,
> And gazed at through crystals of tears.

Need our War Office grudge them?

"Eh, my God!" cried many a French lady to him who writes, "what soldiers, what men your English lads! Smiling, singing, whistling, laughing always, new-shaved and 'coquets' they go to meet death as to a tryst—and all for us."

Then the long train-journey towards the frontier—it also was broken, everywhere there was a stop, but the same assurance of thanks and welcome. All night long the French ladies had kept willing vigil to bring little comforts of food

or coffee to the English soldier passing in the dark, and thank him for his going on their quarrel—no quarrel of their making, but forced on them by the enemy tired of his long pretence of peace—to help, so far as his one life could, to hold the glowering eagle back.

War's enmities every fool can understand; but what friendships war begets, and how immortal those tragically-born children! Already our English folk have learned wider meanings for the once selfish word of Patriotism, and in scores of thousands of English eyes you shall read now, "For France also will I do all that my life can."

At the big, busy, frontier-town war became first fully visible: iron-shuttered houses; silence of manufactures that for forty-four years had known no holiday; a frugal, toilsome people all turned idle, in a clutch of suspense, into the streets; the endless lines of troops and transport, munitions of war; and no trace of peace any longed visible anywhere—it all spelled the word that no one spoke, "The enemy near the gate." Very, very soon he would enter by it, and be wasteful master: the long legitimist rule of peace and frugal comfort be changed to an iron interregnum of alien tyrrany. All that evening the pictures were of moving columns, throttling

every road, roads along which a hundred years ago Napoleon's armies were hurrying to the last fatal tryst of Waterloo: and every road leading at brief interval to the waiting, disdainful enemy. What would to-morrow's battle bring? That day's own battle was as yet only a rumour, like the sting of a spiteful wind in the ear—Mons. The short, crude word was only a name yet, with no clearer meaning than a cold conjecture.

The town seemed very long, and the watching crowds endless; their faces different not only in contour but expression from those of the Havre folk; here too there was welcome, but more tense, hungrier, half-bred betwixt gratitude and suspense. Now too was seen for the first time the ugly cut-throat gesture, to be seen continually henceforth, of a hand sharply drawn across a gullet, silently, or with the one word "*Demain!*" significant invitation to the English soldier of what he should, in the gesticulator's mind, do to-morrow to some German. That the gesture was a woman's or a child's did not make it less grim.

The suburbs stretched such long arms out into the unpastoral country that one hardly knew when they had changed to villages huddled up to the town. But the villages gave more material welcome, and from their houses, poor, mean

houses often, there were continual *sorties* of women, children, old men, carrying offerings to the marching soldiers from England—coffee, wine, apples, sweets, cigarettes, slices of jammed bread—and this went on afterwards in every village till the time came when the villagers themselves had nothing, for the German had been there and taken everything; then the one possible gift of water gave its plain, sad message of ruined generosity.

But that was not yet; you could not realize how near at hand it was on that sultry Sunday evening. At Jenlain the noise of guns, from Mons, became first audible, distant and vague, like the rumble of the thunder that goes with "summer" lightning, and with no more menace to the imagination. At Jenlain the first picture of a camp in the fields made itself, a groping picture blurred by the darkness, in which men and horses and waggons hardly stood out, but mixed with the hot night, and seemed only its shadows; till a fire here and there splashed the muffled blackness with red, and showed coppery faces and hands with no bodies to them. For our officers there was a dinner-party that night —in the village inn, that was half a farm, where the stalwart, wholesome "patron" and his decent, shrewd wife, comely, friendly and active,

bustled to show what they could do for the English. Everyone about the place fussed and ran, cooked and talked, and set places round the big, clean kitchen table. A regular meal, with soup, and stew, fruit and cheese and wine: and it was eaten under the smiling eyes of the hosts, who thought one of the officers too young for war, and one of them (who writes this) by far too old. A pretty-faced lad, with girlish blue eyes and peach-cheeks, and expression of soft innocence, crept to that old officer's elbow, nudged, and drew a confidential hand murderously across his own boyish throat, whispering, "*Demain! Aux Allemands.*"

The inn-keeper's nine-year-old daughter, merry-eyed, nodded a cheerful approbation—it was pleasanter to hear her father bid us drink our King's health, as was done by all, standing. Poor little Gabrielle, poor father and mother, grandparents—that was the last supper to be eaten in that prosperous, friendly home for many a long day: next noon it was a flaming ruin, next afternoon they fled by us on the road, Gabrielle and all of them, with pitiful bundles in their hands—a lump of bread, a blanket, a holy picture, a superannuated dumb canary in a cage.

After supper came the walk up the orderly village street—all to be disordered havoc before

another night—and our first bedroom in the fields. Long and wet the grass seemed, though but with dew and mist, and very, very long the way home to England: there were no home stars to make the sky friendlier; there was no sky; only a huddled blackness, crouching over us, smothering down on us: and already the war seemed one's only life, within which all former life was swallowed up.

Sleep came reluctantly, unhandy yet at picking her way through that maze of blackness to tired eyes that looked, and longed and waited for her coming. She must be sole guest and cannot brook others: and another was there, firm-seated, before her: the one weary, ceaseless preoccupation; the tiresome iterant sense, that did not amount to thought, but was like the thud of a pulse—"It is war." The weary waker, staring up into the dark, felt it between him and England: no calculable leagues separated home and him, but the incalculable, incomprehensible fact of war that flung England and all home-life away into an immeasurable distance, that left him outcast from all that had seemed to mean himself.

It was impossible to get any answer to the question, "What are they in England doing?" They also, as last seen, had assumed the fixity of pictures, and would not move, at any bidding

of imagination, into newer groupings, present occupations. Faces at a window must look out at it for ever, in the same smiling anguish of farewell: waving hands could never turn to any other occupation. Like Josue's moon in Ajalon, the last sun seen in England stood still for ever at the same point in the heavens. War had come, and changing everything, had frozen everything into permanence; as if Memory had given sanctuary to all familiar, lost things, and would no longer suffer them to go out, and move, and live, and be changeable.

Between the present night and all yesterdays there lay a gulf so impossible to bridge by any mere effort of will that one could not imagine it wider, deeper, or more complete and impassable, if Death itself had already intervened. Were he, in fact, to come, what could he do more?

"Free among the dead . . ." How simple and comprehensible that ancient dark saying of the supreme poet had suddenly become. All the tiny, innumerable shackles of life seemed snapped, and their significance fallen into insignificance. It did not even appear easy, or fully sane, to wish for their resuscitation. So immense an emancipation—should one really desire to cancel it?

Surely Agag had meant this: and must have

been besotted had he been willing to turn back, and have, for some brief respital, all the bitterness of death to drink again out of some unknown, later cup.

So sleep stood aloof, and waited till the tired body should thrust forth from the tired spirit the vagrant musings that teased her in guise of thoughts. And, ten miles away, under the black mourning heaven, lay an already martyred country, her silence crying aloud: "O God, how long?"

And the sleepless night dragged on to the reluctant dawn that hated to discard her decent black for the staring red that day must bring to her. And, O God, in Whose Hands the hearts of kings are, what spectres, red and black, must Thou be crowding around the bed of that War Lord who claims Thee so simply for coadjutor and accomplice? If to the innocent, reluctant sharer in it sleep comes so slow-foot and unwilling, how and in what nightmare fashion, shall she creep to his bed, who whistled war out of its snarling kennel to follow him afield . . .? Always his pet, pampered and overfed, it had so long grown used to its master's begging tricks of peace that it hardly could believe the moment come to play at them no longer, and show naked fangs to a world that had watched and dreaded when the reality should be confessed.

II

A PARENTHESIS OF WAR

The men were whistling "Mississippi" as they marched: and he, listening, tried, as he had tried a hundred times before, to catch the slight, elusive air, and whistle it too. Nothing easier than to whistle it *with* them; but he felt certain that, if they should stop, he could not go on—even if it were decorous to go on alone—by himself, and give the air correctly. A pestilent tune! easy and impossible, familiar now for weeks, stale even, and yet refusing to cling to memory except in the most obvious snatches.

"It's because I don't know the words," he said to himself. "There's no connection in the air, and I haven't got the words to connect up the bits."

And his lips rounded themselves to whistle, and a young French soldier watched them with an odd expression.

"Halt!"

Something, miles ahead perhaps, stopped the

way: and for the twentieth time in an hour the whole column halted.

The whistling ceased and the men fell to chatting, and chaffing.

"Fiddler," said a Sergeant, with a queer friendly face, to a babyish-looking bugler, "you're *asking* for sore feet. I *know* you haven't soaped your socks."

"There's only half a one to each foot to soap," urged Fiddler.

"It'd take all the less soap, and leave all the more for your face," retorted the sergeant, who seldom permitted himself to be defeated in argument.

He (the Ancient who could not whistle "Mississippi" by himself) went to the roadside, to sit down luxuriously upon a heap of stones: through the long, dusty grass a field-telegraph-line ran, hidden, and his foot caught in it, and nearly brought him down. The young French soldier, still watching him unapprovingly, observed the beginning of the little accident and almost smiled, but did not smile, since nothing came of it.

The French column was on the right of the road, the English on the left, and the young French soldier had to watch from the other side. He turned to a comrade, of his own nation, glanced at the Ancient, and made a certain

gesture. The Ancient had often seen it before, and had always hated it. It was brief and simple, and consisted in a sharp drawing of the flattened fingers of the right hand across the throat, as though one should draw a knife across someone's gullet—not really one's own. To assist the imagination of dull observers the words " Aux allemands " might accompany the gesture: but in this case there was no such necessity. Both French soldiers perfectly comprehended, and the elder nodded a quite passionless acquiescence as he followed the eyes of his young comrade to the Ancient across the road. The Ancient is so called here as being (for his surroundings) an ancient personage. His white hair and wrinkled hands had nothing to do with all the militant youth about him: and he seemed tired, not so much with marching as with the longer walk of fifty-six years through life. One would say that he was more used to sit at writing by a table than on a stone-heap by the roadside. He saw the young French soldier's gesture, and it hurt him a little, for, though he had never seen the lad before, he liked him. He smiled and stopped himself, not wanting to seem defiant of disapproval. To cover the smile up he lighted a cigarette, which the young French soldier also disapproved—as savouring of nonchalance.

It should be said that the Ancient wore then no uniform, but a black suit, grey with dust, and shabby after many a march.

"Quick march!"

And the column moved on again, and the men began to sing.

It's a long way to Tipperary,
A long way to go:
It's a long, long way to Tipperary
And the sweetest girl I know.
Good-bye, Piccadilly,
Farewell, Leicester Square!
It's a long,long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's right there.

They sang; it was no bawling shout, but the clear, clean singing of hundreds of Irish throats and lips.

To many of them Tipperary really stood for home, and father and mother, wife, and child. For them the song was no mere echo of the Music Halls, but a hymn of home-sickness.

Hundreds of times the Ancient had heard those words and that air: he remembered the first time, and always will remember it . . . the panting August night, the serene, huge harvest moon staring down on the limitless fields of peace across which the comet-tail of war was dragging, the choking dust, the night-silence violated by a clatter of war-noises, shouting, and scraping

of wheels, shrill orders and counter-orders, and the moan of a horse that could do no more for England than die, as the bravest and wisest can do no more. Then a halt, and a half-lull in the babel; and that tune and those words.

There are sweeter tunes, and finer words: but instantly he who heard them for the first time felt their grip and thrust about his heart, as one feels the chill there who comes down in a swing. Then first he resented, as he had resented scores and scores of times since, the inept unworthiness and vulgarism of the fifth and sixth lines. Piccadilly and Leicester Square! Could the rhymester fit nothing better to his wistful, homesick melody than that? Could nothing racier of Tipperary rise to his fancy?—as though a Moujik soldier should begin to wail of Holy Russia and slobber down into a lament for Parisian boulevards.

And yet, and yet the Ancient could never hear the soldier-voices lifted in that song and dare to let his face be seen. All the astounding clearness and simplicity of dread war lifted and glorified that song into a Marseillaise of England's fidelity to France, the war-march of British honesty come to lay down its life for its friend. It was the same now: the song never staled or grew hackneyed: each hearing of it

added association to it, and tune and words brought with them a skein of pictures more poignant in simplicity than any war that any painter has ever left us.

As the Ancient arose from his heap of stones and went back to his place in the column the young French soldier still watched him, and the bent, white head did not disarm his disapproval. But it half puzzled him. He had been quick enough to see on the old face a sharp struggle against assaulting emotion: and he divined that the bending of the head, erect enough before, was to hide the emotion.

"That song," said his comrade, as they also moved on, "is as if one of us should sing of Paris."

But the younger soldier was *meridional,* from the valleys under the Pyrenees, and did not care specially for Paris, which he had never seen. He gave a slight nod and tramped on in silence, wondering why the old man whose throat he thought should be cut had been moved by that singing. He was doubtless a prisoner, a German, and probably a spy.

The Ancient walked on, and on either side of him rode an English officer.

"One of these days," said one of them to him, "you will walk into the German pickets, and

they'll shoot you. And it will all be because you wear no uniform."

The Ancient laughed, but did not argue the point afresh. The other officer said:

"I think that chasseur would cut your throat now if you lagged behind and he could catch you alone. He thinks you're a German prisoner, and wonders why on earth we don't put you out of your misery."

The Ancient thought so too, and laughed again. But it still hurt him a little, for the French had seemed by now quite an old friend, and one dislikes the feeling that a friend desires one's death.

The song went on, and the march went on, and other songs followed. Then came another halt, and another order to move on again; and this time the Ancient fell back a little till his own "lot" had passed; the next "unit" was a little way behind. So he walked alone in a nearly empty stretch of road. Not quite empty, for the young French soldier had lagged too and was just behind him.

"Walk with me," said the Ancient, stopping, till the chassuer was abreast; "I want to talk to you. Do you mind?"

"You talk French then?"

"A little, and badly."

"I find you talk it well. You pronounce better than the English."

"I am English. Yes, I pronounce pretty well for an Englishman: but I lack vocabulary, and often I cannot say what I want in French, because I do not know the French for it, and so I have to say something else instead: something much less interesting. That is tiresome."

The young Frenchman laughed.

"I should say," he observed, "that you would be able to say just what you wanted."

"No. But I can say this——do you still wish to cut my throat?"

"Monsieur!"

"Have you changed your mind?"

"Monsieur!"

"I think you have."

"Monsieur, I do not understand."

"Ah! My French is worse than I thought. Can I not make you understand that I knew you wished to cut my throat just now?"

The young man from the south protested; but the Ancient only laughed at his protestations.

"I wanted," he said, "to have it out with you; that was why I fell behind, hoping you would fall behind too. No doubt it was an accident that you did fall behind. . . ."

"Perfectly."

"Some accidents are sure to happen: I counted on this one. I particularly wished to see if you would still wish to kill me when we were alone and had talked together. And I particularly wanted to talk to you."

"Why, then?"

"Because I liked you."

"Though you supposed I desired to kill you!"

"I did not suppose. I knew."

"How can one like someone who wishes to kill one?"

"I don't know. I was trying, just now, to understand."

He was trying still. It seemed to him possible, that, out of some hidden, perhaps morbid, current of the emotions, a man should have a peculiar attraction for another man who desired, justly as it would seem to that other man, to be his executioner, especially if, in the estimation of the victim, the execution was really mistaken and unjust. He could not recall any instance of such a victim havng displayed—on the scaffold, for instance—the least animosity towards the man from whose hands he was about to receive death. Rather it would seem as though the very strange relation in which victim and executioner stood created between them a subtle tie, clearly felt by the victim.

"You are not now thinking of me," remarked the young chasseur.

There was so delightfully human a touch of boyish pique and vanity in this, that the Ancient laughed aloud.

"Not of you personally. I was trying to understand the difficulty you suggested. But why have you changed your mind?"

"Monsieur!"

"Oh 'Monsieur'! But you do not now in the least desire to cut my throat. If we were alone, and out of sight of everybody, down there in the woods, you would not think of it."

"You are English—one of our good friends."

"Yes, I am your friend. But you only know that I say I am English. If I were really a spy should I stick at a lie?"

"You do not tell lies."

"I don't claim to. It was you who denied that you had wished to——"

"Monsieur, will you not forgive that *bêtise*?"

"I forgave it all along. You are not stupid; you must have seen that at once."

"I saw," said the young man, looking across the fields where the ungarnered corn stood, "that you liked me, the moment you turned and asked me to walk with you. And it shamed me. There was no Why. I had only wished to do you an injury."

"I don't know. It would have been an injury to yourself: cruelty and injustice are the worst things one can do to oneself. But I didn't see that to me it would have made any difference."

"No difference? To be dead or alive?"

"I should still have been alive. You flatter yourself. You cannot make me dead or alive. You might have pushed me round a corner, that is all."

"An ugly corner."

"That's *selon*: it depends—and not on you, my comrade. Besides the best bit of the journey may be just round the ugliest corner."

"You are now reading," said the youth.

"Yes: out of the book one has been writing for fifty-six years."

"You are fifty-six years old? At first I thought you much more—very old: and now I have been thinking you young. Your words come jumping, light on the foot, and they jump into me, as old words do not."

"That is because we are friends. Friends are all of an age. And a friend's words come home to a friend's heart as children come home and sit down by the hearth that wants them."

They did not look at each other as they talked, the French lad and his new, old, English friend: sometimes their eyes rested on the same place,

the horizon, that lay higher than the road whereon they marched; otherwise their eyes did not meet. But they kept step; and the cadence of their footfalls was the pulse of a deep unison.

Passing a cross-road they saw there another body of French troops, infantry, waiting: and among them was a young French priest, a volunteer-chaplain, in cassock and field-cap.

"Excuse me, one minute, I want to go and greet him; we also are comrades," said the Ancient, and he made off quickly.

The young French soldier from the south watched their meeting: he saw them shake hands, like old friends, though neither had ever seen the other before, and saw that they spoke together with easy intimacy, affectionately. When the word to move away came, in less than five minutes, and the French troops marched, the Ancient and the young priest in the cassock parted like brothers going different roads towards the same duty.

When the Ancient rejoined the young soldier, who had waited with a sort of boyish petulance, the latter said, half jealously:

"Another friend!"

"Oh, yes."

"'You knew him?"

"Not before. But he is my brother: we are both priests."

"Are all the English priests like you?"

"I don't know them all. I hope not."

"Why do you hope that?"

"Because I am half a priest and half a poet: and it is better to be simply a priest altogether."

"I should like to read your poems."

"I don't write them. I don't know how. Perhaps I am too happy."

"I see you are happy—though you can scarcely help weeping sometimes. Tell me a thing, will you?"

"Anything I can."

"What makes you happy?"

There was a moment's pause, and, for the first time almost, the lad turned and looked at his friend. He was blushing and the young man, who was a soldier, and a peasant, and a gentleman, was ashamed of his question.

"Oh! I beg your pardon," he said hurriedly. "I am impertinent."

"That is impossible. There is no impertinence between friends. Only I hesitated, because to answer your question I might seem to preach."

"A priest must, sometimes."

"Yes. But I do it badly. It seems always as if everyone must know all one had to tell—I wish you would tell me your name. . . ."

"It is Constantin."

"Well, Constantin: I am too shy to answer your question. Have you ever been in love?"

"I am now."

"And it makes you happy?"

"No, because I am far away—here in this ugly war. That is miserable—to be away."

"I also have been in love all my life: and we are never away. Always together."

A whimsical memory of a word from a great, homely, simple, *genre* writer, glanced into his ever vagrant fancy, "Always the best of friends, Pip, always the best of friends"—and the Ancient smiled at his thought.

"It is a man you love?" said Constantin, in a voice like a clear whisper. His eyes were again on the high horizon, and the Ancient's were there too: it was more intimate than if they had turned and looked each into the other's face. Against the yellow sky upon the ridge there stood out a long black way-post, with arms, like an empty cross.

"Yes, it is a Man," the Ancient answered.

"And between you and Him there are no quarrels?"

"None of His making. Mine have been the ladder of our intimacy, each one a step upward to something more like knowledge. To Him they could make no difference; He knew *me* all along."

"In my love," said Constantin, "there come moments when it seems wisest not to know too much—only to be blind: none of us are perfect."

"No, none of *us*. I am luckier than you, having all the imperfections on my side."

The lad pondered this saying, and presently said, abruptly, something that had nothing to do with it.

"Should you talk like this to an English soldier?"

"There is no such thing as an English soldier in general. One talks to each man as he is. To you I can talk thus—perhaps because we never met before, and shall never meet again."

"I shall meet you again if I can," said Constantin, with decision.

The Ancient thanked him with a smile, and said: "Whether we do meet again or no we are friends, and that matters more. To talk is not so good as to remember."

"And you," cried the lad, jealously, "will remember me as the fellow who desired to cut your throat."

"I shall remember you," the Ancient answered, "as you are."

One of the English officers came riding back to look for him. He laughed as he drew near, and said:

"He hasn't stuck his bayonet into you?"

"He has only made a little hole in my heart. Do go away again."

"It's not my fault if he cuts your throat."

The English Major turned his horse again, laughing, and said over his shoulder:

"I did not understand his English," said Constantin, "but I do not like him. He came to look after you."

The sun setting on the empty cornfields was becoming marvellous; a singular grey-pink light, half pearl, half opal, clear and yet hard, like porcelaine, had taken hold of everything. The Ancient watched it with a wistful tenderness, like worship.

"There is no one to carry the corn," said Constantin, watching his friend's eyes to see what held them.

"No one."

"Is it not sad to see them empty . . . those fields?"

"They are not."

Constantin looked, as though he had been looking along some wand that pointed.

"You see someone?" he asked.

The Ancient nodded, and the lad answered himself.

"The same One?" he said. "The Man you love?"

He did not turn to see if his friend nodded again, but held his eyes on the far horizon that seemed hardly nearer than when they had first looked at it. Presently he spoke again.

"That Man," he said, "I hardly know Him. I do not do many sins. But I hardly know Him; I, I am young——"

"So is He. Eternal and always young."

"And I am a man——"

"So is He."

"But I live among men, and them I can love."

Another echo smote the memory of the Ancient from a poet this time, one of those poets who had been able to say for him the things he could only feel: a sad echo too.

> A saw God sitting above me;
> And I, I sat among men,
> And I have loved these.

"He also lives among men, and loves them——"

"Why?" asked the lad abruptly.

"I often wonder. To teach us perhaps. In that you and He are alike. But, Constantin, if you can do that, that difficult divine thing, you can do the other; it is much easier."

"Easier to love Him?"

"Ever so much. What shabby turn does He ever serve us? When He is preoccupied, or

busy, or taken up with others? You like me?"

"Yes, because *you* like *me*——"

"Yes; but you might come to me and find me speaking to someone else. I can only talk to one friend at a time."

"That is true. I should not care to talk to you when you had to try and speak with someone else as well."

"That's the difference. One always has Him to oneself—in all this crowded, talking world."

"I have never talked to Him."

"That is not His fault."

"Nor He to me."

"Neither is that His fault: it is your misfortune. He is no vulgar pusher of Himself. He only follows and waits and——"

"What?"

"Loves. It is a horrible thing to love and deserve love, and never get it. That is His story. I know you can pity it. You saw in a moment that I loved you: and, though I have never done one single thing for you, you would feel pity for me if you had not loved me back."

"Ah, but you *have* done something for me. Ever so much. We met by the roadside, strangers out of all the world, and you saw in me a silly, brutal fellow that wanted to kill you.

Yes, it is true, I confess it; and at the first sound of your voice I knew you loved me. Is that nothing? Who am I? You can see; a *piou-piou* of the south, a fellow from nowhere, of no account, and you—"

"Do stop, Constantin. It is *impossible* you can see so much, and not see more. You wanted to kill me: justly as you thought—a cruel justice, though. We *have* killed Him, not as a spy, and all His revenge is to love us. You asked 'Why': and, God knows, I can't say. There was a saint once, and she cried, 'Of a truth Thou hast made a fool of Thyself, Jesus Christ, for Thy love of us.'"

That saying smote the heart of the lad, and his clean, tender, sensitive mouth showed a twist, like pain. His eyes and his lips could express pain more easily than mirth. Him also the Galilean was conquering.

"She was a saint," he said, "but a woman; I could not confess to her. To you I could, because you are a man, and not a saint. Look there——"

By the wayside, at a desolate corner of the road, was a Calvary. "Consider," they had written beneath the lonely figure, "if there be a sorrow like to my sorrow."

And the lad understood at last that it was no

plaint of pain, no outcry against cross, and nails, and thorns. Only the supreme lament of unloved Divine Love, lonely and uncared for.

"Let me confess here," said the lad.

And the old man in the shabby, worn-out garments, road-stained and dusty, sat down upon the steps of the cross, while the dying sun reddened again those agonized, hungry arms, flung wide and high above him, to draw all things to their embrace.

And another echo struck him. . . . "With the chords of a man: the strings of Adam."

But the lad's eyes were no longer seeking the Dead Christ on the Cross, above him; they sought the living Friend whom his friend saw in the fields through which their road lay.

"Tell me," he pleaded, "a thing, to encourage me. Why do you love Him so much?"

"Because He has forgiven so much," said the old man, making his own confession first.

III

AT CROSS-WAYS

A FLAT village sitting at cross-roads, with a biggish church in the open space where the ways met: and all the space, and both roads, jammed with lines of troops and transport. Beyond the village level fields, some marshy with withy-beds that in England would have been likely to hold foxes, and some green with the beetroot-foliage; not many trees, and any there were in long lines, like lines of march. Far and low horizons with nothing to break them, and of the same dun hue as the cross sky. And mud. That was the picture.

A dull village; with nothing to mark it off from the villages of yesterday; and, except for the soldiers, no young men in it: only women, children, and old or oldish men. All the troops at a standstill. A discussion between the officer commanding a unit and one of his Captains, each armed with a map and an opinion of his own: the C. O. favouring the road straight ahead, the

younger officer that to the left. An Irish mess-cook demanding of a woman at a house-door if she had "any Dooly to sell": she, with French acumen, understanding, and producing milk.

Fiddler, the bugler, smiling on the civil public in general, not without hope of apples.

An Army Service Corps driver, with his neck tied up in flannel, addressing his two Belgian horses in the purest idiom of Munster. He changes their names daily: yesterday they were Fairy and Flirt, to-day they are Ginger and Blackstrap. But the Irish voice is always the same, and it expresses a dogged conviction that horses can't get on without oats. A motor-cyclist dispatch-rider, who should be in the last throes of becoming a senior wrangler, and is actually a corporal, grim, mudded to the eyes, and yelping "Keep to your right!" dashes through. The group he splashes opine darkly that he might as well be a spy as not.

Nothing else is happening, or may happen for the next five hours. On the other hand all the troops and transport may have melted off into the grey landscape before the clock in the church belfry strikes again.

The Ancient looks at the church, and makes at it through the crowd. The doors are open and he can get in. Very often the priests are all

away, gone to carry their rifles somewhere in the long line of defence stretching from the extreme south-east to the extreme north-west of France. Then the churches are locked, and the keys are with the mayor. Here the priest is too old to serve, and the church is open.

All the wide space of nave and aisles is deep in straw: a regiment of cuirassiers were God's guests in the church last night. They went away at sunrise, and to-night perhaps another regiment will come.

Over the entrance-doors is a wide gallery, with quaint pictures, not easy to understand, painted on its front, and on the walls behind and at either side. They seem to refer to another war, all of whose combatants have passed into the Great Peace three hundred years ago. The drawing is stiff and harsh, the colours rude, but no doubt the peasants of these fields, who saw them when they were painted, understand them well enough.

Bits of carving in the walls, and at the pillar-heads, hint at an older church than the present, certainly much older than the boastful, dilapidated Renaissance high altar. That was very gorgeous once, but could never have been very beautiful: its bulges and curligigs, its cupids (they could never have looked like cherubs) all belong to a bad and decadent taste, not the true

and sane Renaissance. The tabernacle, huge, and pretentiously ornate, sobered only by time and decay, is ugly enough. But millions of Communions have been given from it, and its architecture never mattered.

It is empty now. No doubt the Blessed Sacrament is in the presbytery. Our Lady's Altar has a forest of candlesticks and vases, handsome and poor, given by the members of a confraternity. St. Joseph's, at the head of the opposite aisle, has a crack in the wall beside it, into which a burnt-sienna coloured slug is insinuating himself.

Against one of the big pillars a much newer statue, on a wooden pedestal, stands, with the *tricolore* for background. On a lower table in front of it are candles, and to some of them are pinned written papers, with a soldier's name on them, or "*Priez pour France.*" The figure is a young girl's in silvery armour, bareheaded, with long fair hair, and patient sad eyes, upturned; her left hand holds a helmet; clasped in her right is the ancient Oriflamme of France—the Blessed Maid, Joan. The Ancient, who has prayed to the absent Master of the tabernacle; at His Mother's shrine, and His foster-father's; kneels to beg the patriot-martyr to forward those pitiful, tender entreaties pinned to the candles at her feet.

When he gets up again, he finds himself no longer alone in the big church. A broad-shouldered lad of twenty, with grave, dark eyes, in a cavalry uniform, stands in the deep straw just behind where he has been kneeling.

He nods soberly to the Ancient, and says:

"So you pray to her?"

"Do not you?"

"I was not praying at all. I was watching you. You pray to her, then?"

"Did you think I was pretending?"

"No, Monsieur. But it seemed to me strange."

"And to me strange that you do not. You are a French soldier."

"Yes, I am a French soldier. It is that. If I should pray to her it would be natural."

"So I think. But you leave it, it seems, to me."

"And you are English. That is what I thought odd. She was your enemy."

"The English were her enemies. She is in heaven, and no one is her enemy. But you and I—we are on earth: and we are not enemies."

"No. Comrades."

"Thank you, comrade. In this place one would rather think of that."

The stalwart French lad gave a little smile,

very courteous, and it had the effect of a bow; but he must have been a little obstinate, for he said:

"Yes, we are good friends now, your country and mine. But then; when *she* was alive," and he turned a thumb towards the statue, and shook his curly head to complete his sentence.

"She *is* alive," the Ancient objected.

"But your people killed her."

"Some of my people (and some of yours, I think, killed all they could. Not her. No one can kill you or me."

"Some German may kill us both."

"Your young body, and my old one. That's all. It's no great triumph. It's only doing the work of some disease, or some unskilled doctor, or of mere old age, before the time; I mean a little sooner than one had thought."

The cuirassier took his large hands out of the pockets of his loose, red riding-breeches. I wish there was a word for that soft, unblatant colour, which is certainly not scarlet, nor crimson, nor cherry-colour: there are some geraniums almost of the tint, or they would seem so if they could fade a little without witherng.

"Monsieur," said the soldier, "I do not feel like that. You speak of your body as if it were of no account."

"My body isn't of much. There's not much of it, and it isn't interesting. I should be sorry to think it was *I*."

"Well, mine is me."

"I hope not."

"Why, then? What fault have you to find with it?"

"None, as your body. It is strong, and healthy I should say, and of a good shape. And the face at the top of it is all right. I find it easy to talk to your face. But it would be impossible if that were all. One could as easily talk to a dead wall with a carved head in stone on it. It is to *you* one can speak—because there is something else besides your body and your face."

"You mean, perhaps, my soul."

"Certainly I do."

"Eh, well! My soul. Monsieur, I am twenty years old and I have not met it."

"An inhospitality! If I went to your house—where is it?"

"Near St. Maximin: I am Provençal."

"Of the poets' country! Well, if I went to your house, and you were there, would you ignore my presence?"

"Monsieur, I should be honoured by your visit."

"Just a chance visit, of an old stranger, with no claim upon you. But I would not risk it—I should tire of waiting twenty years to meet you."

"But, Monsieur, that is different. I can see you: no one has ever seen my soul."

"If so it is your fault. You must have been hiding it—even from yourself."

"Can *you* see it?"

"I am trying."

"*Sans succes?*"

"No. There are glimpses: in spite of your obstinacy."

"You think I am obstinate?"

"I am sure."

"Well, yes. That is part of my character. So they say at home."

It was so obvious that the young Provençal enjoyed talking of himself that it even struck *him*.

"Monsieur," he said, abruptly, "I am wasting your time."

"Does that mean you are tired of talking to me?"

"No. To the contrary. It is interesting: one can understand—you talk French perfectly."

"That is not true: I hope it is equally untrue about your soul. I happen to speak French

quckly but ill. I use, you perceive, no idioms.''

'' 'Idioms ' are ' private expressions,' are they not ?'' The young soldier remarked with another little smile.

'' In that sense I use idioms—but my own, not those of France. However, if I can make you understand, it does not matter.''

'' I understand, and I like this talk—one is tired of the war, and the war, and the war.''

'' I would rather talk of Peace. For I know nothing about war.''

'' You are, I think, an interpreter.''

'' No. I am a chaplain.''

'' Oh, I knew you were a priest. Are you a chaplain only for the war, or in permanence ?''

'' I am always a chaplain. I belong to our Army.''

'' With a grade, is it not ?''

'' Yes; of Colonel.''

'' Well, my Colonel, let us go on talking. Perhaps I am indiscreet asking so many questions ?''

'' Not at all. But do not say ' My Colonel ' : I am not that; our own soldiers call me ' Father.' ''

'' You are, then, a monk.''

'' No. I have not that honour. Only a

secular priest. But our people think all priests their Fathers."

"You called me once 'Comrade.' I liked that. I may call you 'My Father and Comrade'?"

"Yes: and 'friend.'"

One of the large hands was held out at once very courteously and friendly; and they shook hands, close by the shrine of the Blessed Patriot-Maid.

"Our *entente cordiale*," said the Frenchman, smiling.

If nothing else ever came of it, it did not seem to the Ancient that it would have been a waste of time. Every Englishman and Frenchman making friends seemed to him a sweetening of the acidities of war.

"May I know my friend's name?" asked the Provencal. "Mine is Pertuis Jacques."

"And the only part of mine you will ever be able to pronounce is Jean."

And the Ancient pulled the envelope of a letter from his pocket and gave it to the lad. Jacques looked firmly at it, but confessed that it was hopeless.

"However," he said, "if I may I will keep this —in memory of my English priest."

"Have you many priest-friends?"

"None."

"Your fault, Jacques."

"Perhaps."

"No. Certainly. Thousands are your comrades in this war. You must have met many."

"Yes. Monsieur, they are admirable. France is proud of them. They are the most brave, the most devoted."

"Thank you, Jacques. I am not French, though I love every field of France as if I had been born on it. But you praise the high courtiers of my own King."

"It is a wonderful thing," the young man said, gravely, with an odd respect, "this Catholic Church of ours. I am a bad Catholic, as you see; nevertheless, I am proud of these priests of ours, not only because they are French and I am French; you too, English, feel as I. If I praised *you,* you would not be pleased——"

"You could not. It would be bad manners."

"Yes. But it pleases you to hear *them* praised. Because they are more your brothers than if they were of your nation and not priests."

"Yes, Jacques; it is a wonderful thing this Catholic Church of ours—that makes even her children who try not to be good so good in spite of themselves."

"You think I try not to be good?"

"You try to be deaf and blind. . . ."

"And you think me good!"

"Dear Jacques, I think God made you, and that He will not let His great work be spoiled because a wayward lad is obstinate and will not see what a great work it is."

The young soldier was sitting down now in the deep straw, his back almost turned to the statue of the Maid; the Ancient, half-kneeling, half-sitting, had his face to it. Through one of the large, plain windows a ragged glint of pale sunlight smote in across the empty church, and touched the face of the statue. The lips seemed to express a more tender patience.

The lad picked up a straw and played with it; sometimes looking down; then, lifting his sombre eyes, met the old priest's with them, and he threw the straw away.

"Eh, but I am bored," he said.

"With me?"

"Oh, no! I tell you this interests me. But I am bored. It is the war."

"I think not, Jacques."

"If there were fighting; but you know how it is——"

"Yes. I know how it is. It is not the war. Fighting would make you forget it, no doubt. But it is you who bore yourself."

"That is true."

"I knew it was. What one cannot hide from oneself one can never hide from a friend."

"Why then do *you* say I am bored?"

"Because of this—stupidity of yours."

Jacque's clear, olive-brown face flushed a little.

"You do not think me intelligent, then?" he said, with patent disappointment.

"God made you so. This stupidity is half an affectation, half a bad habit."

"I have other bad habits."

"Very likely. They generally like to have plenty of company."

"Shall I tell you them?"

"No, Jacques. I am not hearing your confession. But I will say this—you find them tedious masters."

"I think all masters are tedious. One's master says 'Go there' when one wishes to go another way; and 'Do this' when one has meant to do that—or nothing."

"Only when he and you are of two minds. So bad men do not find the Devil's orders tedious. That shows a thing—you are bored to death doing what he tells you. You are not bad yet."

"I remember," said the lad, with the straw between his teeth again, "when I was good enough. Can you figure that?"

"Very easily. It requires no great imagination. 'Good enough'—though. Enough for whom?"

"You must settle for yourself what I meant," said the lad, half wistfully.

"I suppose you meant good enough for God. Now you are not even good enough for yourself."

"Yet a while ago you called me good!"

"You must settle for yourself what I meant."

The Provençal smiled and put his hands down in his lap.

"We are fencing," he said. "You want to say things and are too shy. And I want to hear them, and am too shy to ask."

"Yes, I am shy. But more than that. I am afraid."

"Afraid?"

" Yes. Of saying the wrong thing. Because I am stupid."

"You also! I thought it was I."

" You and I both. In different fashions. Mine is the stupidity of not knowing how to say what I know is true; yours that of refusing to admit a truth that you know is there."

"What truth?"

"That your body is not you. When you please it, it does not please you. That is what you mean when you say 'Eh, I am bored.' "

"You have settled what I meant!"

And again the grave, dissatisfied eyes softened with a friendly smile.

Up in the tower, high over their heads, there came a grinding, clanking onise. The clock was going to strike.

"We have talked a long while," said the Ancient. "Perhaps my people have gone on, and I shall have to try to find and follow them. I suppose we must stop talking——"

"You are sorry?"

"Yes. Because it is for ever. I did not come in here to look for you, nor you to find me. But we have met, and we are friends. And I hate to see my friends no more."

"You are sure we shall meet no more?" asked the lad, and he smiled, not flippantly, with a lifted, pointing finger.

"Ah, Jacques! Who can tell? You may become a saint, and God knows what I may become. I meant here on this earth, in this war."

"I knew what you meant. But—stay a little longer. We have settled nothing."

The Ancient knew it was a bribe, but he did not mind being bribed. After all no one can do two things at once, and there *might* be something to do here.

"No, we have settled nothing. We are not likely to."

"I have discouraged you?" said the young soldier—he had a kind heart. "That makes me sorry. It is a pity I am not different."

"It is a pity we are not all of us different. No, Jacques, you have not discouraged me. Did you think me so conceited as to imagine that a word or two of an old, strange man could alter a young man's established thought?"

"I did not," the Provençal answered, simply, "think you conceited. Perhaps," he added, gently, in a very low, plain voice, "perhaps it is I who am conceited."

"Listen, Jacques! There would be no conceit in your refusing to make much account of what a chance stranger chose to say to you—unknown, uninvited . . ."

"Not uninvited," the young man protested, holding out an interrupting hand. "I have been inviting you all the time."

"I am glad. Still you had no need to listen to me: if you would listen to a Voice that never stammers, nor makes mistakes, that is not old, but a Young Man's, who understands all that I can only guess at stumblingly, who understands you much, much better and gentlier than you understand yourself. . . ."

From the great chancel-arch there hung down, high over both their heads, a plain huge cross, and the Ancient tried not to look towards it, but the image of the dying Young Man upon it, who looks thence to draw all things to Himself, drew his eyes too.

"The Christ!" whispered the lad, refusing to let his own eyes follow there. "*He* will be my Judge."

"Not till you have utterly condemned yourself."

The young man shuddered.

"Afraid? Afraid of *Him?*" cried the old priest. "Afraid of being judged by Him? I am not then. I should be afraid to be judged by *you*. You who say, anyway, that you do not even try to be good; you who must pretend that goodness is impossible—a counterfeit and show, a cheat; *you* would demand of every poor priest simple perfection, and condemn us because we are not angels but men. I would not be judged by *you*: nor by any man, not even by a saint. Only absolute Perfection and Omniscience could be tolerable in one's judge. If you are afraid it is because you have forgotten Him."

"I seemed to know once—do you think any Frenchman forgets the day of his First Communion?"

"Many try to. Many pretend to have succeeded."

"I will not pretend. Always I remember."

"Memory is a part of oneself. Nothing remembered is lost to oneself. A man cannot lay aside his arms or his heart by refusing to acknowledge their presence or function. Tell me this other part of you."

"There is nothing great to tell. Only I remember it. He was real then. But He is a Memory only, now."

"When a man who has seen the King becomes blind the King is only a memory to *him*. He was not more real while the man who has fallen blind could see him."

The young soldier never failed to listen, nor ever failed to understand. But a wayward twist of obstinacy clutched him, and he said, after the twentieth part of a moment's weighing of what the Ancient had said:

"You forget I am a Republican."

"Did I? I only remembered perhaps that we are both men, and men have not cast aside the true images of poetry when they have cast out their kings."

"Comrade—you are not angry that I like best that title? I beg your pardon. If I am

Republican you at least are the subject of a Monarchy."

"I am. Of the oldest conceivable. Of a King even you have not dethroned, though you are squandering yourself in an agonizing pretence of rebellion. St. Paul cried out in anguish: 'The evil that I would not that I do: the good that I would I do not.' But in the beginning he was different. Then it was the evil that he would not he tried to do; he was young then. But that other young Man you are afraid of met him in the way and saved him from tearing himself to rags of folly. Good-bye, Jacques. Alas, alas it must be good-bye. I must go. And here in this war you and I will meet no more: but you and he will meet. You have met. His Wisdom will be stronger than your silliness. *Omnia vincit amor.* In that supreme combat He is Omnipotent. He has looked on you and loved you: and you will be ashamed to be proud still, face to face with that infinite humility. . . ."

All the time, since the clock had struck, they had slowly, with many stoppings, been moving down the empty church towards the door. They had reached it now, and they passed out by it together. Most of the troops were gone.

"That way, Monsieur!" a good-natured woman, who had seen the priest go in, called

out to him, from her door, pointing along the road to the left.

Jacques watched him follow across the deep mud of the open space: very deep mud, in which the Ancient stumbled once, his ungainly boot catching against a big stone hidden in the mire. The young man, with a smile half wistful, half whimsical, wholly gentle and kindly, watched the hurrying old figure, round-shouldered, and the white hair (overdue for cutting), and the homely, ruddy face, as it turned to smile Farewell. And he confessed to himself, for he was frank and honest, with all his petulant, young perversity—

"An ugly body. Unless there was something in it that one cannot see I would not have talked all this while to *it*. I would not care even to see *it* again. But I do care. And I have nothing to do. He does not know there are cross-roads again half a kilometre out there. I will go with him—to say *Au Revoir*—as far as the cross-roads. Ay, and farther, perhaps."

Perhaps.

Does one expect to see right along every road to its ultimate goal beyond the horizon, where the quiet heaven bends down to mingle with the upturned, humble face of earth? It is that ambition that frets and disappoints us.

IV

ENGLISH.

An orchard flanking a well-to-do farm-house, itself the last house in a village: the village stone-built, like all the others in that region. The cottages along the street more like farm-houses than the actual one by the orchard, because the latter had smartened itself up, and half villafied itself. The street curving down to its middle-point like a slackly strung rope, and in the hollow of the dip the church, locked and empty, priestless; the priest a soldier somewhere.

In the street hardly any native life: *our* lot just arrived, but scarcely any villagers showing: shuttered houses, blind-eyed, perhaps hiding cowering peasants, women, children, old men: the emptiness of the street striking oddly, as though it were midnight and daylight.

Two English officers, very dusty, after a march that had begun at break of dawn, glancing about as they trudged tiredly along to the billet in the orchard. A door gingerly opened and an old

face thrust out. "Monsieur! Should we fly?"

"Fly? But no." One of the Englishmen calls out "What should one fly from?"

"The Germans—one says they are at the next village."

The Englishman does not believe—a mere scare: and says so. "*We* are stopping here to-night," he argues. "If they were at * * * * we should not be staying here."

The old grey face, unconvinced, ready for misfortune, haggard, but stonily calm, goes in, and the door shuts: a bolt creaks: and the two Englishmen move on.

"Should you have advised that?" asks the younger of them.

"To stay? Why on earth should they flee when no man pursueth?"

"I don't feel sure of that. There's something in the air—a menace."

They came to the gate into the orchard, rather a narrow gate, not convenient for getting great ambulance-waggons through: the orchard itself not very convenient for packing them; some already in, their horses out and being watered, or being taken out, others being got in up the steep, soft slope from the road.

Under the trees, next the hedge on one side,

officers' servants choosing spots for their masters' bedding, and unrolling the blankets. In a corner, the men's cooks making a fire, and piling up their big cooking-pots ("Dixies" they call them) round it, the officers' cooks lighting a much smaller, opposition fire near where the servants are laying out the blankets; another servant "laying the dining-room table," *i. e.*, setting enamelled tin mugs, numb-looking knives and forks, on a waterproof sheet on the grass.

Some officers washing themselves, out of canvas buckets: one or two shaving, and also walking about. The Ancient decides both to wash and shave, and gathers together the essentials, then walks off to the farm. At the pump, and at a horse-trough, a fierce washing and splashing of men stripped to the waist. He asks, insinuatingly, at the kitchen-door if there is any room where he may go and wash too: the proposition received favourably; and he is escorted to a room on the ground-floor, tiled, and opening on to a walled garden with a few dahlias and a good many high-stepping hens in it. The room contains a big bedstead, almost grandiose, and a chair with three legs and an empty butter-tub sustaining the fourth corner; also a table covered with ragged American leather, on which are three used paper collars coloured like

meerschaum pipes, an extremely small tin bowl, and a bucket full of water presumably second-hand. On a shelf is a fine old Renaissance crucifix, on a chest of drawers a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes with little pots of cow-medicines at her feet. There is a framed photograph (an enlargement, evidently, and woolly) of the master of the house, in the uniform of a *Marechale Chef de Logis* of a cavalry regiment: the original far, far away. When did he last lie in that hot-looking bed? Will he ever come back to lie in it again? His unknown guest entreats that he may: and tries to take the comfort of a promise from the portrait—not a fateful face, but round, well-satisfied; the figure dapper, stoutish, prosperous. No tragic wistfulness in the big, wide-opened, shrewd eyes. But eh! alas! if only the fateful-faced ones fell, how short would be the roll of the slain. . . .

Outside the window in the garden it seems there is another pump, and three exploring soldiers discover it; and after considerable, if hasty, peeling, pump obligingly on each other. The Ancient hands out his bucket and begs for a clean re-fill.

On the tiled floor he manages almost a bath. Then, a shave; then a return to the orchard, and supper which happens to be dinner also. It is

dark now, and the few lights, here and there among the crowded trees, show up Rembrandtish groups and faces.

A motor-cyclist dispatch-rider arrives before the cheese.

"Up and off."

In the dark the "beds" are hurriedly rolled up again: fires are kicked out: pots and kettles huddled away into their waggons: horses quickly harnessed, their drivers condoling with them over unfinished oats; cracking of boughs as the waggons struggle through the trees, quite invisible now in the moonless dark; in wonderfully few minutes what was a camp is a camp no longer, and the "unit" waits in the road for the order to march. Silent groups of peasants flit by, homeless now: you can hear their shuffling feet, their breathing as they pass close to you, hardly a voice, even in a sob; even the children make no wail, hurry and dread hold them too silent. Whither they go they know not; why, they can scarce know, those babies on whom (as on their fathers gone already whither they know not) the horrible, dull riddle of the war has fallen. One wonders when they will come back—to-morrow? Never? Is the darkness swallowing, assimilating, them? or will the dawn's light see them creeping chilly home, after a nightmare

of false alarm? Part of the riddle. In a thousand variants the riddle keeps asking itself all day, all night, always.

One cannot see the village. Not a light in any house of it. Not a glint of moonshine catches belfry or gable anywhere. Swallowed, too, in the thick, hot, dusty dark.

One thinks of Keats' village—"emptied of its folk this pious morn," its villagers all gone following the lowing kine to the festal sacrifice: not by association does that bland and lovely picture come louping into memory—by contrast. No pious eve this—or is it? Of what unfestal sacrifice are these village-folk themselves the victims?

"Quick march."

The cadence of five hundred feet, no sound else. No song whistled or sung. And nothing visible: no doubt each man can see his neighbour, but no eye could pick out of the blackness any shape of the whole marching column. It moves along the bottom of the night as though gulfed in a black and great water. No man of all that march has ever seen the fields that flank his road, nor ever will see them: what they may be like he cannot guess, nor is he guessing: if there be homes here they do not betray their nearness, but huddle into the sombre, stealthy

skirts of the night. There may be corn-lands, garden-plots, trees, orchards—there may be anything; an army, friendly, or hostile. Somewhere hereabouts are two armies, our own, of which this little block of silent-moving men forms a tiny part; perhaps that of our French comrades; we do not know in the least; certainly not far off, that of our swift, alert foe. We do not know: not to know anything is for such as ourselves a note of this early phase of the war.

And no one asks: no questions are heard, no surmise. Perhaps every man wonders, but none asks "Whither?" or "Why?" The Ancient wonders too: not whither, or why: for the name of one place would mean as little to him, if he knew it, as that of another: nor if he could be told the actual purpose of each march would he perhaps understand, for to him all war and strategy are an unlearned language. Only he wonders of what the men are thinking as they go: of what homes, friends, partings?

Sometimes one can tell by the sound of the marching feet that they fall on a narrowed road between high banks; oftener there must be flat ground to left and right.

"Halt!"

Cross-roads, and a momentary pause. Then the way to the left is chosen and the column

moves again. Uphill this time. For a bare half-mile.

Then there comes the clatter of a ridden horse galloping after us, and its rider, finding the commanding officer, tells him,

"They are there. At the top of the hill. . . ."

The Ancient, close by, hears him.

Another halt, and a turn about; to turn the waggons is very difficult: they are not made to turn on narrow roads, and on a narrow road without flat ground on either side would be impossible; who can tell in this smother of darkness whether this road be broad or narrow, what it is like to right and left? They *are* turned, and it is "Quick march!" again, downhill. Odd to think who was behind; to wonder how near?

For a long way it is downhill, easier going for tired feet, and for a long way the road passes between steep high banks. The silence, and the rhythmic monotone of the marching feet makes one sleepy, deadly sleepy. What luxury if one could lie down among the soft, deep dust of the wayside and be asleep. Can one sleep walking; is there only the somnambulance of disease? Often the Ancient thought he must have slept moving; perhaps only for a few moments, that seemed to have been long.

Another halt at last: a long wait, and then the

orders not to camp, but for all to rest where they were. Some lay down at once on the roadside, some clambered up the high banks and lay among the stubble they found at the top. The Ancient scrambled up to the driving-seat of a waggon, intending to sleep there. But the night was cold now, and the sleep that had seemed to swallow him up, to assault him like an obsession, as he walked, would not come now that it was bidden. Ficklest of friends ! So rude to thrust herself on us uninvited at awkward moments, so standing upon punctilio when entreated.

The horses slept: their driver slept: someone inside the waggon was certainly asleep, as he assured the public most resonantly.

The Ancient tried to sleep by telling himself a story of matchless pointlessness and *banalité* about a man called Jones, who had twelve children, and the eldest married Carolina Williams and had twelve children, the eldest of whom, etc., etc. But it would not do: he only began to have a monstrous interest in the alliances of the Jones family.

The man asleep inside the waggon slept on, but ceased to snore. There was no sound now except the occasional jingle of harness as a horse shifted in his sleep.

At last there came another sound, very strange

and troubling, of someone weeping: of someone invisible behind the curtain of the waggon, but close, close to, crying very low and quietly. There were no women there to weep: and the memory of the Ancient, always errant and vagrant, clapped into his mind that great saying of the old heathen historian, concerning a tribe of the very people now our enemies: "It is for their women, indeed, to weep: for their men to remember."

Was this Englishman who wept remembering too?

What more gross than for one man to thrust in and show himself aware of another man's tears? In broad daylight, face to face, the Ancient could not have done it: he must have turned away and hidden the indiscretion of having noted.

But in this thick and lonely night, two awake in the midst of a sleeping company, it seemed different: the two watchers so near together, hardly a foot of space between them, for one to hold himself aloof, discreetly heedless, from the trouble in some young heart so near his own, seemed but a cold and callous hardness.

"What is it?" he whispered, drawing the curtain aside, and bending towards it.

It was so dark that the whiteness of the cur-

tains barely showed less black than the night herself; so much darker inside that no face became visible.

"Sir, I thought everyone was asleep. I didn't know as you was there." A young voice, with the northland burr in it that to the Ancient, north-country born, always sounds homely, friendly.

"I beg your pardon . . ."

"Nay, it's me as should. I niver thought to trooble no one."

"It only troubles me to think you are in trouble. I'm ashamed to have let you know I heard you, only I couldn't help it. You and I are the only ones awake, and one of us is sad—I couldn't help speaking, though one man's words can't alter another's trouble."

"Sir, I thank you kindly. They're all strange to me yet; I've ne'er a choom; there's bin no time yet, nor yet no chance, o' making any. So I think. And I couldna sleep: and . . . I were thinking of my gal."

"Are you engaged to be married?"

"Nay, I *am* married. There's the trooble. Married not twelve months. And my wife she was near her time—not full come it wasn't, but near. Then the mobilization order came, and I had to get over to Dublin; and the very day we

embarked came a letter, not from her, but from her sister; and it was gave me on board, and I read it as we was moving down and the folk cheering, and the sirens squealin', and it said how Tessie'd worried o'er me going, and her pains had coom on her: and the child had been born, and she very ill an' all, and the nurse as was Catholic, like yourself, sir, had christened him after me, but he died an hour after. . . ."

A little pause, a struggle too easy to divine, though by hard force inaudible, and the young voice took up its humble plain tale.

"I'd told her, a hoondred times, as soon there'd be the little 'un to comfort her. And she'd listen, an' cooldna say me Nay. She know'd it 'ud comfort her. Yet it troobled her an' all as the child 'ud coom and me not there to give it e'er a welcome. 'Eh, Jim, but I niver thought to be left alone *then*,' she said, and I told her nor me eether; but it was just Dooty, and had to be doon; and she couldna say me Nay to that eether, nor she didna try. She didna cry, but her face daunted me. She didna cry not even when I coomed away; p'raps she couldna, p'raps she wouldna—but she fell out o' me arms, and it was like death she looked: and that Irish nurse I told you of ran in, and

made me a sign as I had better go, and I *had* to go."

Another little struggling pause, and then:

"Eh, Sir: when I knew as she hadna the child to think on—we'd both on us bin thinking of it, and plotting for it iver so long—when I couldna say any more, as I'd said to myself o'er and o'er again, 'The child'll coomfort her: it'll force her to think of *it,* i'stid o' think, think, thinking o' me': and all the crowd o' the ship, and all the crowds on the quays, cheering, and the sirens yelling. . . . Eh, Sir, it were bitter 'ard. . . . And just now it all coomed o'er me again: and . . . Sir, ye'd niver guess what it is to a yoong man to know as he can niver see his soon's face as he's longed to see so many long days. The times I've fancied it! And the times I've plotted for it, and said 'I'll do this and that for the child.' . . . and I'll *niver* see it: and the poor lass to have but a peep of it, and then to see it no more eether. And she's delicate: p'raps she's gone to seek it . . . and if so our little home's gone wi' her. I could niver fancy tryin' to make anoother, if that as I brought her back to is gone: niver. I couldna fancy being hoosband to another woman, nor father to anoother woman's child. . . ."

What can a man say to comfort a pain like that?

He may know what he *should* say; may know well where the only hope of comfort lies: but to be glib in saying it, how smug and shallow must one be for that! And must God always need an interpreter? If He keeps His own reverent silence, and will not always speak aloud to wounded hearts of His children, *must* it be always that some blundering man may try to be more eloquent than He?

The young voice fell, and the old voice could not soon trespass on the terrible sacred silence. Silence herself sat between the old man and the young, making friends of them. And the old man could do nothing but keep saying to that other Young Man of Nazareth, "Do it yourself. You care more than I. It was your wound: heal it."

It was the young sonless father who spoke at last.

"Sir," he said, whispering, "are you asleep?"

"Asleep! God forbid that I could sleep: I'm not so bad as that."

"Bad, eh, boot you're kind."

A big young hand had come out through the curtain, and its owner felt it wet.

"I didn't dare to say anything," said the old

man. "I longed to, but I durst not. I'm stupid, but I would not be impertinent."

"I'd like it if you'd talk. You'd niver say a word to hurt me: and I'm lonesome for none to talk to."

Then they did talk: the young man saying as much as the old. Perhaps that way he got most ease. But I am shy to set down all that strange talk here: for it was strange how two men, alone in that darkness, awake in the midst of so many sleepers, with so many dreams perhaps being dreamed so near at hand, two men so divided by age, by religion, by the course of life, could talk of the great real things of life, neither knowing the other's name, one at least not knowing the other's face, and be at home together, in that foreign land, and grow intimate as only sorrow and the sharing of sorrow can make us: one of them very generous in taking for help the mere desire to help, the other very humble and reverent at the simple, unwitting revelation of a nature very manly, singularly pure and unselfish, marvellously refined, with a refinement that no uncouth fashion of speech, nor rough phrase, could hide or alter: of a nature very brave, for all those tears, most manly and with a plain unbraggart readiness for danger and for duty.

I have spoken, a moment since, of the differ-

ence of faith between the two men: but, between them in the night there was God, and at that Divine bridge they met, and stood together, not seeing each other for the darkness, but seeing Him.

Another of these beginnings without an end ?

V

NEITHER

The endless-seeming September drawing to its end, but not yet drawn to it: blazing noons still, and blazing afternoons: skies pittilessly cloudless all the fierce day long, cloudless at sunfall, but aflame without cloud-fuel to set on fire; and then a cloudless twilight, short and hurrying, another war-day panting to its death in the night's grey arms. Then the moon, huge and splendid, more golden than silver, sun-hot looking; the harvest-moon, staring over limitless harvest-fields at the harvest ungarnered. At last, night—stabbed on the horizons with lurid thrusts of death-fire, visible pulses of war's throbbing fever.

But now, the mid-month past, the nights learn to seem as chill as the days have been burning; and, at dawn, about the knees of the woods that clamber down into the deep, steep valleys, swings a veil of pale gauze, and in the valley-bottoms too, not only in that wider one where the river that has already christened a battle

winds through water-meadows, but in all the maze of narrow valleys where no river is. Soon, at the sun's signal this ghostly oriflamme slips from the wooded bluff, and hangs itself a few waiting moments out in mid-air, pearl-white and opal: then the sun conquers, and the white flag yields itself and is not.

Then comes a night of rain, black and bitter, and there is neither moon nor stars: and another, with a clean-washed, shining day dividing them. And so for many nights, rain, rain, rain: and always boastful, flaring days between: and the deep dust is deep mud.

Our camp on a table-land, treeless, standing high above deep valleys almost tree-choked. And presently we cease to be a camp, and the whole unit is sanctuaried in an ancient place of God: a high stone wall, grey by nature, greyer by the caress of more than half a dozen centuries, shuts in a twenty-acre plot, garden, crops and homesteading. Over the wall one sees from far off the high roof of a lovely chapel, and lower roofs of enormous Gothic barns: once a Preceptory of the martyred Order of the Temple: after the shameful murder of that Order, whose blood from every land of Christendom cried to Heaven's like Abel's, the Preceptory became a house of St. Bernard's Order of Citeaux, and

through the centuries the white monks tilled these upland fields, keeping God's silence, far from the clatter of arms and tongues. The huge barns, two-storied, whose upper roofs are held aloft by immense Gothic pillars of stone, were *their* barns: and the great church, lancet-windowed, was *their* church. But the grey-black building at the western end of the vast farm-yard, half-fortalice, with towered angles, of the eleventh century, was the Templars', and is not a ruin yet.

At the Revolution the Cistercians' long reign here ceased, and the Sacrifice ceased, never to be offered here again till an old priest from over-seas, of the race of France's traditional enemies, should come with France's now war-friends, to offer it once more; and the Preceptory and the abbey has for over a century been simply a vast farm-house.

The farmer was born in the Templars' house, though he lives now in the homestead at the opposite end of the long quadrangle, built out of stones that were once a part of the abbey, and not raw-looking or incongruous: or rather the farmers, for there are two brothers, both away now in the deeper furrow of the trenches.

The Cistercian church stables over a score of huge plough-oxen, clad in the white habit of

Citeaux; sedate, solemn, but not severe of mein, keeping St. Bernard's silence, toilsome, useful, harmless, innocent, they seem to desecrate the dead fane as little as any aliens could. In the night-stillness, when the moon thrusts in through the high, empty windows a long arm of virgin light, and one can but surmise the white shapes clustered in the blackness of the unlit sanctuary, they are as seemly ghosts for the innocent haunting of that choir as anyone could picture there. Their lot of patient labour, their lifelong tribute of plain duty, their dumb praise of Him who laid their life too upon them, and made them bear it, humbly and nobly, fulfilling each a fragment of His immense purpose, does this not also preach; the Cistercian silence unwittingly carrying on its unending sermon ?

If Rembrandt were not dead ! what pictures for him ! The long, broad, open space between the barns, with groups of cattle and of soldiers, camp-fires, red hands held out to the blaze, dancing shadows of men on the barn-walls, titanic figures black on the pallid-grey, and, behind, the frowning fortalice-hospice, and beyond that, the last red relics of a dead day, a blood-stained fringe on the blackening robe of Night. . . .

A Friday morning; and, outside the great

Renaissance entrance-gate of the homestead, wounded men being laid down in the deep straw of a long cart-shed: no carts there now, only the pitiful long rows of tattered bodies of lads and men: married men whose wives and children they are praying may not presently be widows and orphaned lads, unwed, unbetrothed unless it be to Death, from whose inexorable tryst they seem to have no shrinking: all, husbands and youths alike, unfretful, without complaint: by each sits Hope, gently, with unheard whispers to some of the promise of life, to others the Greater Promise of a Life now clearly perceived, which never can be quite plainly seen till the learner has learned how small a matter Death is. It is only the bustle and preoccupation of life's trivialities that makes so great entanglement of death's knot, and dresses it up in the threat of finality; common life itself is the knot, twisted up of false needs and futile longings: we turn a sharp corner and Death holds out scissors ready to cut the hopeless-seeming tangle. We find that the dreaded frown and scowl is a cowardly legend, that he is no angry stranger, eternal adversary of life, but only a homely usher, mildly, with smile of conscious apology, waiting to open a door, beyond which his function ceases.

Among the rows of wounded the priest moves,

seeking his own sons, though in truth he feels father of them all. Here is one: Irish, not dangerously wounded, but badly hurt and in great pain of body; in none at all of mind, but smiling, cheery, very glad to talk, and to talk to a priest, and, Irish-fashion, ready to assume that every English-speaking priest is an Irishman: more than half right this time.

Here is another: Scots, of the almost swarthy Highland type, deep-eyed, black-browed, with hard black hair, and skin through whose darkness glows a dusky flush. He comes from a little island lonely in the sad western sea, a crofter-lad, and silent by habit of his lonely life, but not hard to win to talk—of home; a home emptied by the war of father, and of five brethren, all out here: only the mother left to pray and to do six men's work as best she can: easier this work because of the emptied home; none to cook for, none to mend for: and the praying may salt the hard outdoor toil, and toil and praying God sets to stand between her and futile loneliness. The silent-natured lad makes pictures of his few plain words, and it is easy to see them—the great waste of ocean, and the great waste of sky for background, and for fore-piece a bent and praying woman, a frugal, rugged figure, doing man's work that her men may do the work of

unsung heroes here in these opulent fields of France. She herself is very easy to divine from the son's short, plain talking: a Mother in Israel. If she had fifty sons, like Hecuba, she would not grudge the sending from her side of all of them to fight: it is God's battle they are gone to fight; if He sends not all home He may be trusted to lift them to a better place. This son's right arm is shattered: will the priest write to her?

Near him lies another Scot, not Catholic—as far from Catholic as the General Assembly of the Kirk may be from the College of Cardinals: but he also has inviting eyes, and as the priest makes to move on they beg him to linger. His name is David, and, like David, he is of a ruddy countenance: in the clear eyes there is a light of innocence, like a dog's, and of fidelity, and lovingness.

"Sir-r," he almost whispers, with the bewitching Scot's burring of the r, and a shyness wholly compelling. "I would be glad if ye would comfort me too. I'm Presbyterian: but, perr-haps. . . ."

"No perhaps: if I can make you feel less lonely. . . ."

"It's that, sir: just that only. I'm not so varra badly wounded: only it came over me

hearing yon lad talking to ye of his folk, to talk a wee of mine. There's nane here that would under-r-stand, but I'm thinking *you* would . . . hame's hame, Catholic or Presbyterian, Hielandman or Lowland, and eh ! mine's far away . . ."

He soon dropped "Sir," and called the Papistical, prelatical priest "Father" and meant it, and felt it. His own father was in heaven; his mother had none on earth but him. To her also the priest was to write. Simply and shyly he talked of God: and in that common Friend found instantly a bridge of meeting, that strode at once athwart all estrangement of belief.

"Ye gave," he said soon, "a wee Christ upon the Cross to yon Catholic fellow. Have ye, Father, e'en one for me ? Eh ! it's strange! I've seen a whole village smashed, and a whole kirk, by the Germans' shells, but the great Christ upon the Cross stood untouched, His arms spread out, His head leaned weary, His face turned up to cry His Father's mercy on us men that killed Him . . . and all the shells couldna break Him; and He said, I mind, 'When I am lifted up I'll draw all to myself.' Father, pray Him to draw *me*. I've been a wilful laddy, and His words have been dour and dismal talk to me . . . and I went aye my ain gait, that wasna His, and I liked laughing-talk, and merry things,

and noo I know what suffering is, and I can understand better. . . . Father, ye'll mind to ask Him mak' me His ain laddie. Ma mither gave me, willing, to the war, as *His* gave Him, willing, to the death: ye'll write to her, and pray for her? And I'll keep this Christ upon the Cross ye gave me all my life long, if any more of it is for me, and I'll never forget ye, Father, never: if He gives it me to win hame again, I'll pray always for ye: and most on Saturday at e'en, when we make the evening exercise preparing for the Sabbath, and if not . . ."

"If you get Home before me, to that other Home, you will pray still for me, that I may come there too?"

"Deed will I! Good-bye, Father. . . ."

And, next, an enemy. God save the silly mark, for the priest has none. A Pole: a lad of nineteen, but of a big, stalwart figure; tall, strong and stout, and, somehow, ox-like; heavy of build, broad of chest and shoulder, slow (one would say) of motion, when life and strength were his, and now all life ebbing fast to its close.

He had been wounded on Sunday—and this was Friday: shot through the bottom of the back so as to be utterly helpless, incapable of movement, and yet, alas, not killed. They had found him early today, lying on his face in the dank,

sodden woods; his body sodden and dank too: all gangrened now from head to foot. Through five horrible nights of pitiless rain he had lain alone, unfed, untended, anguished, slowly rotting from youthful life to inevitable death. Pitiful Jesus! what a Purgatory for such little faults as his!

He could not move: he could only lie upon his face—and wait.

He had no French, little German: but enough of the latter to confess himself. He could not move, and the priest could only lie down beside him in the blood-reeking straw, to get near enough to hear the sobbing whispers of his confession.

He had no beauty, nor comeliness, like a Greater than he: only a big, once strong, body, all rotted now. An ungainly head, of a low mentality as to shape: lips green and terrible; eyes like the eyes of an ox, slow, large, inexpressive: and the one expression in them, "Why?"

He had no talk of home: of father, mother, brethren: or of fatherland. No talk of any sort. Hardly words enough, in the speech of his country's thief and spoiler, to confess himself. And no time: the dregs of life almost all spilled—at life's threshold. Yet he confessed: as though,

throughout the ineffable anguish of those five ghastly night's rain, he had been preparing for the chance encounter of a priest, or, if not, for the certain coming of the Great Priest of all who surely would not suffer him to die alone. Then the anointing. He tried to turn outwards the palms of the terrible hands on which he lay; but could not. He tried with awful endeavor, to turn his head for the anointing of eyes, and ears and nostrils and mouth; but could not All that remained to him of power he used to lift himself, as he lay face downwards, at each recurrence of the Name Ineffable, in the Latin Office: and each time he forced the stiffened, frightful lips to form the sound of the Name Incorruptible. . . . " Jesus !" " Jesus !"

All the rest of the Latin was to him incomprehensible; but that Supreme Word he knew, and waited for; and for every recurrence of it he was ready; and the great, half-dead body obeyed the dying will, and undying loyalty, of the simple peasant-soul; and slowly, with awful insistence, the soul bade the body lift itself, and the bowed head bow lower, and the fearful lips form themselves into the sound that is for the saving of the nations . . . " Jesus !" " Jesus !" " Misericordia !" So that the old priest, lying beside the dying lad in the blood and straw,

shrank almost, for ruth and reverence, from uttering It, knowing that He whose It is was there, and that the Greater Priest than he was waiting for that loyal soul to fold it to His Heart . . . and at the last recurrence of It, the Polish peasant-warrior, feeling himself called to the Great Peace, twisted the ghastly gangrened lips into a childish smile, lifted himself in a supreme effort, bowed his head at his King's Feet, and whispering "JESUS," needed no further speech of ours.

About the dead lad, who had died in no quarrel of his country's, but in that of one of his country's merciless riflers and despoilers, at the hard, plain call of sheer obedience, hung no terrible odours such as Nature would have told us should be there: but, such a fragrance as those who know the sweetness of the Name he worshipped might expect.

VI

WAR DOGS

A MERRY-AIRED morning, that might have lost its way into the war out of some September when Peace was as much taken for granted as All Fools' Day: a morning all sun-laughter, and titter of little winds that played together hide and seek among the forest-leaves: good forest smells too—some dry and incense-like; others cooler, moister, leaf-smells and earth-smells, but all breath of the empty, pondering woodland. A sky, clear, aloof, ocean-blue, with fleets of small cloud-ships at sea in it.

Last night's camp, in a sloping orchard by the wayside, already half-forgotten: abandoned at daybreak, only reached long after the nightfall of yesterday, it belongs to past things, dimly held in memory, as much as any chance acquaintance of a journey made long ago.

Even the road along which one has since passed not easy to recall:—which village came first—the long one, straggling down from a bluff

to a stony river; or the hamlet wedged about a toy church in a saucer of the downs? the gaunt stone farm, half like a fortalice, compact within blind walls; or the other that seemed as much an outcrop of the soft, rich soil as the opulent ricks about it?

Noon not nearly come; but certainly, one would say, dinner-time.

For some while the march had been athwart a table-land, sparsely treed; now it ends at the lip of a wide, but deep valley; water-meadows laid flat along the bottom, the sides hung with close-packed trees. Through them the road slopes and twists down to a town—to two towns, one on either side of a ridge, the only one that spans the river.

Once in the little town the column is halted, and the halt lasts perhaps an hour.

A white town, of clean, shining houses, with spruce gardens, and some assumption of provincial consequence, and gentility: too large for a dominant château, but with a score of houses that would do for château in a smaller place.

The Ancient, idly observant, is observed idly, and perhaps conjecturally.

Standing in a narrow *place,* with the fine gates of a good house at one end of it, he is considered meditatively by a small group—a cobbler,

evidently, with scrubby hair; a lean lad with gaunt, melancholy eyes; and two women. The women's eyes are not melancholy, but fierce: not deep, like the boy's, with the darkness that comes from depth, as does the darkness of a tarn in a hollow of the woods, but shallow and black, with the blackness that is merely colour, like a blob of ink splashed on a white board: hard eyes, and shrewd, watching not telling.

They are mother and daughter, the Ancient decides: and the middle-aged woman's eyes are harder than the old one's. The cheeks of both are white; the mother's like white parchment, the daughter's like white paper.

The cobbler, catching the stranger's eye, ogles the "English" cigarette, unlighted, in his hand, and benevolently (but with *arrière pensée*) suggests matches.

"Matches!" cries the younger woman, not much above a whisper, but with a sharp sibilation that seems almost to echo in the little wedge-shaped *place*. "Matches!"

The cobbler, meeker than most cobblers, half withdraws the twisted knuckles he was bringing from behind the tattered leathern apron: but the Ancient, undismayed, holds his own hand out for the matches, with half a dozen English cigarettes in it.

"Come!" says the woman, "I will show you a thing. They were here last night . . ."

"The Germans . . .?"

"The devils. Come; you will see."

The old woman nods, and nods, with bitter approval.

The cobbler begins to shake his frowsy head, but spits instead.

"It is that . . .," he observes, spitting again to clear his mouth for the full enjoyment of the cigarette he lights apologetically.

Towards the fine gates of wrought iron the two women move, and the younger one commands rather than invites the Ancient to follow on.

She does not talk much—yet. She is willing to allow the stranger's mind to remain fallow for the impression she intends.

Inside the fine gates there is a smart garden, not very large, perhaps not in the best taste, but with much ostentation of a certain taste: rather ugly statues, very ugly fountains, stone balustrades fencing nothing in particular. The statues represent not heathen deities, naked and unadorned, but heathenish modern females, half-naked, and lost to any shame.

But the garden is, somehow, ruinous: not with the dilapidation of time, and decay, but squalid

with the havoc of wanton spoiling: the havoc of yesterday, raw and brutal. If dirt is matter out of place, the garden is all dirty: broken chairs strew it, new chairs, not broken by long or careful use, but smashed in careful misuse: ugly, costly ornaments litter it, thrown out of the window, and broken in their fall: some of them deserved little better, but the throwers had not destroyed them in protest against their sham beauty, but because they took the beauty for granted and were minded to ruin it. Other things had been tossed out because they were useful, kitchen-gear and suchlike, and the throwers chose to render them useless.

The doorsteps were foul and littered, as if a generation of Auction Sales had passed over them—and Auctioneer's myrmidons, who can render beggarly in a day the decency of immemorial tenancy. But here it was thieves who had passed, and they had done it all in the time between one sunset and another: rags and tatters; smashed bottles; filth from God knows whence; children's toys—dolls' limbs of carcasses, torn pictures, school-prizes. . . .

In the entrance-hall the dirt seemed more dirty, because one was within-doors. The thick, costly carpet, smart and blatant a week ago, was like the floor of a cattle-shed, only cattle do not

spill trays of food upon their floors, nor are they sick upon them.

And parts of women's dresses, veils, and gloves, gowns and shawls, or shreds of them, had been rifled from above stairs, strewn here and trampled.

In every room there was the same squalor of ruin: where no worse had been done, furniture was overthrown, broken, or torn, where tearing was possible. In every room there were ghastly remnants of feasts; a grand-piano had been a supper-table, and the key-board was a splash-board, where soup that could not be swallowed had been flung; stews had been emptied among the chords, into which were thrust also broken vases, reams of unused, but crumpled and foul, writing-paper, hundreds of picture postcards, and letters from friends or kinsfolk of the desecrated home's owners.

In grim, and almost silent, triumph, the Ancient's two guides led him through these ruined places: the windows were all tight-shut, and there were everywhere sour smells of spilled, stale wine, and spilled, stale food, vinegar, salad (this was often on the sofas and chairs, often on the floor, often splattered on the walls and hangings), horrible relics of stews and hashes, livid lumps of discarded meat. . . .

The staircase was only a steeper variant of the hall, a ladder of shame and shamelessness. The upstairs rooms were much worse. Perhaps because they had really been nicer than the rooms of state and show below. Here one could see there had been less expense, more comfort: still here also it was easy to see there had been opulence and neatness, and good order as well. Everything was at topsy-turvy now. Sheets twisted round table-legs; mirrors broken; wardrobes flung, face downwards on the floors, and smashed open from behind; heavy and rich curtains torn down, as though for extra blanketing, and left on beds where revellers had slept: boxes of tooth-powder used, one would say, for playful missiles, and so their pinky contents powdering sofas, armchairs, carpets.

It was hard to say which had been ladies' rooms, which men's; for the same monkeyish industry in havoc was visible everywhere—good men's clothing, torn or fouled, thrust on to ladies' toilet-tables, and women's inner garments festooning the racks of what had been a gun-room.

Up here there were fouler and more sickening smells, and the Ancient's two guides interrupted their silence to explain them, in language that English women would have been shy of.

"Look at the beds!" they urged . . . which was what the Ancient had only done once—before he understood. "I said 'DEVILS'; what do you call it? That filth. . . . Then came the insistent superfluous explanation.

They would not spare him. He must see everything—and smell it. He must understand that these had been *officers,* they who had done these things: officers, and, no doubt, their orderlies, who would only dare to do what their iron masters approved, and did too.

The Ancient must see the stables, littered with the books and clothing of the ladies of the house; with the playthings from the children's nursery; with drawing-room cushions, dinner ware, toilet ware. . . .

At last he did escape, back into the clean sunlight of the little *place.*

"There!" hissed the younger woman. "You have seen."

Then, suddenly, with brawny arms akimbo, she thrust her face into his, and cried:

"I should not mind, I, if *that* house were all. They are rich folk, those. From Paris. They can buy a new home. In Paris, eating well, drinking good wine, they will not miss it all."

And, as she spoke, the Ancient saw in her a great-granddaughter of the *tricoteuses.* Livid,

furious, cold, pitiless, her fury was not all for the invader, or chiefly even, as it seemed; but for the rich.

"*Hein!* I pity not that one. He and his. They are not of our *pays.* Not of us. They are of Paris. They buy this house, and stuff it, with all that stuff that could feed half our street, and come here in summer, to eat and drink, and play: then the Boche comes and spoils it all. So be it. Amen. I do not care, I."

Certainly she was of the *tricoteuses,* and a type the Ancient had not yet seen. Only *one* type, by the grace of God, and not typical, as of the French women in general. Very unlike the French women he had mostly known, sober, kindly: unenvious, content to toil and enjoy frugally the frugal fruits of industry and prudence—with God's blessing on it.

"But, come!" she cried, grabbing the Ancient's shoulder, "and I will show you. You shall see what I pity. Ah-h."

And with a very swift turn she pushed him through an open door and up a steep stone stair to a home that consisted of a single floor, three or four rooms, all very small.

"This," she almost yelled, "was, two days ago, the home of one of *us,* of our *pays,* of one who ploughed it, and picked it, bit by bit, out of

the ground, with *his* hands, and his wife's, and his wife's mother's hands, and his son's hands, and his daughter's hands. Look, HERE !''

There was the same ruin, and havoc, and filth, and devilment: only more crowded, and more striking, and more visibly damnable, for being crammed into so much smaller spaces and for being the ruin of a poorer, slower effort at decency and order and comfort. The garments were sadder, I think, because they had cost so much less money, so much more time, so much more labour. There was little here that had been superfluous: little that had stood for sheer ornament: by slow degrees the things that make the difference between poverty and ease of life had been earned and added to the home. All alike, now, lay soiled, battered, trampled, derided, desecrated. Children's garments, fashioned by tired hands after the children had been laid to bed; men's garments patched and mended, with frugal care; the mother's own fête-clothes, saved from year to year, and never despised as out of fashion; all dragged about, fouled, torn, ruined: the bits of furniture, gathered at slow intervals, the strictest necessaries first, then the few witnesses of a late-won prosperity—an armchair, an *escritore*—all broken, thrown down, insulted. . . .

"*Here* is what I pity!" cries the virago. "And you? What does your England know of such work as this? Your place is an island, they tell. Does the Boche come to *you?* Does he play these hell-games in your poor-folks' hard, hard-earned homes? *Remember!*"

She no longer housed her words sparingly: but vomited them, with a fury of prodigality. She neither waited for, or wanted, any response. She wanted to enjoy the spitting out of her rage; she liked it better than the daintest meal. And yet all her vehemence was less eloquent than the pitiful ruin in which she stood. The few rooms had been clean, with all the proud cleanliness of a part not of sentiment, as it is with the English peasant, but a part of economy: and how it could have been made so foul in so brief a time was hard to understand. No description could convey the result of squalor, achieved by mere destruction, misuse, a spiteful resolve to spoil, and to insult insensate things.

. . . . . .

When the Ancient escaped the column had moved on, and he had to hurry after it, with his late guide's "Remember" stinging in his ears.

As it happened the march was nearly finished for that day. Crossing the bridge, to the other

little town with another name, winding up by a steep white road, he found the "unit" turned aside into a flat field with the deep valley twisted round it on three sides. A lovely place: and a miracle that it had not suggested to someone a great castle. The field was full of cows, and some of the soldiers were already trying to catch and milk them: but even when caught it was not easy to milk them. There were woods nearly all round, and presently puffs of smoke detached themselves from among the trees, followed by the familiar noise. Whose guns? Ours or the enemies? Both, it seemed; and it was not easy to guess which were which: it was less easy still to make out at what they were firing. Down river one could see far, between the widely parted lips of the valley: above the two towns the river took an immense sweep, almost encircling the place where we were; down river the woods of the right bank, as we looked at it, were, it should seem, held by our artillery: the left by the enemy: but where the curve came it appeared that part of them was held by us, part by the foe.

To be where we were sounds rather dangerous, and perhaps was so: after a few hours it was dangerous enough for us to receive an order to quit. But, at the time, it only seemed very

lovely: the day was so smiling and good-tempered; the mysterious woods seemed so little to lose their immemorial peace by the odd tenants they held unseen. Half-way up the hillside, in one place, in a clearing among the trees, was a large house, surrounded by many barns, with a trim, sloping garden in front: not a château, but the wealthy abode of a *Maître de Forges:* his *usines* lay along the river-side beneath, under the keen eyes of his windows. Three or four times, or more, a German aeroplane came close over us, like a dazzling white bird up in the blue: and instantly shells began to burst all around it. When one was driven away another came—often during the afternoon. None was brought down.

The afternoon grew hot, for the breeze fell: it was hard to keep awake, after the start at daybreak, and the long march.

So the Ancient sallied forth to explore. He found a street of villas, each overlooking the valley, and each with a pretty garden: all empty. It was easy to enter, for the Germans had been there, and had broken the doors open.

From one to another the Ancient passed, finding in each the same ruin, havoc, spoiling, desecration, filth, and shame; you would say that bands of malevolent apes had been holding spiteful, senseless, ingeniously destructive Carni-

val there: as though, long kept under by the superiority of Man they had seized a moment of anarchy for revenge—not revenge of an injury, but of Man's hated superiority. So they had outraged Man's sense of decency and reverence; had marked for peculiar insult and desecration the things Man holds sacred by nature—the privacies of his women-folk, the play of his children, the shrine of his hearth.

VII

NOUGHTS AND CROSSES

One Sunday evening towards sundown our unit stood still, lined up along a roadside in a cheerful village of Northern France—French Flanders: what was once Spanish Flanders.

The wonderfully skilful move from the Aisne had been carried out with amazing quietness and success. The whole British Army had silently flitted north, and stood to bar the way to Calais: its place had been deftly taken by the French.

There had been nights and nights of weird, silent marching through the dark; often through forests, often passing through sleeping villages, sometimes through sleeping towns; then a train journey, bitterly cold, for that night was one of hard frost. Each section entrained at a different place and detrained at a different place, so there was no clashing and no confusion. For this reason we ourselves had been carried to a point beyond our destination, and had to march back.

We went straight through a large town, the only one we had seen by daylight since the very first day of our arrival at the front. The men glanced right and left, rather longingly, at the shops and cafés, and with peculiar interest at a big circus in a plot of waste ground; but we marched straight through and were soon out in the country again. A pretty, home-like country, not flat, but with rounded, grassy contours and sloping valley-pastures with cows in them, and farm-houses, not very un-English. Then a mining district, with populous long villages, straggling rather slipshod along the highway, one naked street to each and no side-streets or lanes: not poverty-stricken at all, but not gracious or home-like, somewhat loveless and unlovely like mining villages anywhere.

That Sunday evening we were just emerging from the mining region, but not quite emerged. There were plenty of folk, and they were all turned out to watch us go by; they were too civil to make many remarks, but they smiled instead, and nodded encouraging heads, and patted their hands together for applause.

The Ancient did indeed overhear a little remark, and retorted on the lad who made it.

"I was just as young as you—forty years ago."

"Monsieur talks French!" half a dozen voices broke out. "Where do you come from? Where are you going? When will the war end?"

"Madame, I never know anything, and if I did I shouldn't be allowed to tell you."

"There! That is prudence: that is right."

And all the heads of the questioners wagged approvingly.

The lad who had found the Ancient elderly had edged nearer, and was clearly disposed for conversation. There were two others with him.

"Is Monsieur an Aumônier?"

"Certainly."

"Protestant, no doubt?"

"Not unless the Pope is a Protestant. I have the honour to be of his household."

Everybody was much interested. "There! a Catholic like us. The English King is a good man, he sends Catholic priests for the Catholic soldiers. There is something!"

They had been kindly and civil before: thinking the old man was a Pasteur and Protestant, they had respected his age, and the calling that sent him to minister to the spiritual needs of another faith; but now there was a sort of intimacy and *relationship* in their smiling encouragement. I wonder how many times during

the war it came in upon one what a wonderful great thing the Catholic Church is.

"Monsieur," said the lad whose innocent little remark had been overheard, "my brother here is to be a priest. But the Germans are in his Seminary. We are refugees—from Arras."

He was a big lad (taller than his elder brother) and had a singular sweetness of innocence in his face: and he took the old priest's hand and pressed it as affectionately as if he had been his grandson.

"I," said the third lad, "am their cousin: also a refugee. We have no news of our parents. I wish the English would go and drive the Boches out of Arras."

"Are you also going to be a priest?"

"No. I am an artillery-student: in a month or two I shall be old enough to go and fight. Pray for me, Father."

"And for me, and for Raoul," put in the first lad, "and for our parents. They don't know what has happened to us."

The word was passed that we were to stop in that village: we were talking by the railings of a big, rather gaunt château, and there it seemed we were to take up our quarters.

"It is empty," explained Ernest (Ernest was my first friend), "it belongs to the people we are

staying with: but they do not live in it. May I take you to them?"

They were charming people: not aristocrats, but wealthy *bourgeois,* with frank, open manners, and brimming over with hospitality. They lived in an immense, most comfortable, farm behind the château, and it was their ambition that we should use the château as a hospital. We went and looked at it. It had innumerable vast rooms very lofty and airy, all paved with diamond-shaped slabs of black and white marble. The Commanding Officer agreed that it would make a good hospital, and promised to use it if we stayed—we never knew.

We slept in it that night: but long before it was light had orders to move on. Just as we started, in a thick dank fog, a huge bundle of letters was thrust into the Ancient's hands. He walked on, waiting till it should be light enough to read them. At last it was light enough; the fog, still thick, had turned first dusky yellow, then grey, then white.

It was cold work reading the letters; the Ancient's hands as he held them up were numbed by the frosty fog. Absorbed in home-news he walked slowly, sometimes standing still altogether, and fell behind the unit, which disappeared in the fog. Presently the bundle of

letters under his arm slipped and fell down in the mud. As he straightened himself up again a voice demanded:

"Where are you going?"

Not an easy question to answer, as he never knew the name of the place whither the unit was bound. The man who put it was a French sentry, an elderly soldier, armed with a beard, and also with a bayonet that was groping uncomfortably near the Ancient's ribs.

"Where are you going?"

"Wherever the unit is going. It is in front."

"There is no English unit in front. Where do you come from?"

"Last night we slept at Hesdigneul. My unit is Field Ambulance No. 15: of the 5th Division."

"You say you are English."

"I didn't say so, but I am, as you can hear by my French."

"Other foreigners talk French with a foreign accent besides the English; perhaps you are German."

The bayonet was hovering, quite longingly, round the Ancient's ribs, and the point of it gave a little poke at his chest.

"I am not German. If you allow your

bayonet to make a mistake you will get into trouble, Monsieur. I belong to the English Army."

"To what arm"

"I have told you. To No. 15 Field Ambulance."

"Are you a doctor?"

"No. I am a chaplain. See, all these letters addressed to me; that is my name: that is the corps I am attached to."

Perhaps he could not read; he certainly could not read the Ancient's rather long name.

"It seems to me you have a great many letters and papers. That is more like a spy. Besides you are not in any uniform."

He made no bones of his desire to complete the introduction between his bayonet and the supposed spy's chest. He was a rather one-idead person, and seemed constitutionally obstinate.

"If you imagine I am a spy take me prisoner, and march me along till you come to my unit, they will soon tell you who I am."

"I tell you there is no English unit in front. I have just come down the road and met no one."

The Ancient was certainly pleased to see the figures of two other French soldiers looming through the fog, which was now much less thick.

He laughed to himself to remember how cheered Maggie Tulliver had been when the other gipsies came upon the scene, thinking that if she had to be murdered it would be more sociable to be killed by a larger party. To tell the truth he never expected to be killed.

"Here!" my captor called out, "I've an old prisoner: an old Boche: an old spy."

The other two soldiers drew near much interested. They were quite young, and looked good-natured.

"Messieurs," protested the Ancient laughing, "he accuses me quite justly of being old. I apoligize. But unless you help me to persuade him that I am not a Boche and not a spy, I shall never get any older."

The sentry stated his case against me: and poked his bayonet at my bundle of letters with extreme disapproval.

"If you could read English you would be perfectly welcome to read the letters," said the Ancient. "They are from friends."

"Spies' friends," urged the sentry.

"No. *My* friends. Look here, one of them is from the General commanding my army Corps. If you can find him, take me to him, and see what he says."

Unfortunately, as the Ancient knew very well,

the letter, being on small ordinary note-paper, did not look at all official or convincing.

"If his friend is the General commanding an Army Corps," observed one of the new arrivals, "you'd better avoid any accidents." And he knocked up the point of the hovering bayonet with cheerful *insouciance*.

My first friend grumbled and repeated all his grounds of suspicion: my new friends listened judicially to my arguments and found them reasonable.

"Just hold these letters while I light a cigarette," the Ancient requested: with painfully shallow diplomacy, continuing his speech for the defence.

"English cigarettes?" commented one of the soldiers.

"Yes—may I offer you a few?"

Permission was not refused. Even the austere sentry absent-mindedly grasped a handful: from that moment it was clear that he had receded from his high position.

The Ancient went on talking, opening a parcel as he spoke. It contained woolly articles—socks, mittens, etc.

"Perhaps," he surmised, "you have not been able to change your socks very recently?"

The surmise was correct. The sentry, indeed,

mentioned a date so remote that the Ancient rather hoped he would not remove them quite instantly. Having administered the socks the Ancient did not await any summing-up or judgment as to his defence, but wished his friends good-morning and moved off.

"*A tantôt!*" the younger soldiers called out.

The sentry laid down his weapon and proceeded to change his socks.

A hundred yards farther on the Ancient met one of the men of his unit—

"They're all in that field. We're waiting for orders."

There was scarcely any mist now, and the sun had risen. In the fog, twenty minutes before, the elderly sentry had, I suppose, not seen the English troops drawn off into the field.

Very soon we got orders to move on, and went through a town; then about four kilomètres beyond it we again halted: and there was another long wait. During the wait an old, shabby peasant on a bicycle was arrested, at the instance of a Staff Officer (ours was not the only unit halted there), who thought he had a spy-some look.

The Ancient was asked to pump him, and did so, but not with acerbity. Having so recently been taken for a spy himself, perhaps he was

inclined to indulgence. His verdict was that the old peasant seemed guilty of nothing worse than fright and stupidity.

Presently the Commanding Officer came to the Ancient and asked if he would like to go with a section on special duty. He said "Yes," and prepared to go. The last time he had left the unit on a special duty it had proved rather "lively"; and, as all the talk now was of something peculiarly lively impending, he imagined this would be more so. He did not therefore wish his servant to go with him, as the man was married and had children.

Finding him the Ancient said:

"I am going off somewhere on some special duty, and I want you to get my things. You're not coming."

"No? Did the C.O. say I wasn't to, sir?"

"I didn't ask for you. You will, please, stop with the unit. It isn't your section that's going: and I expect we shall have a lively time. You came last time. This time I shall not take you: you have a wife, and children."

The Ancient gave the man certain directions, in case he himself did not come back. He had a conviction that he would not come back. So much for presentiments: for as it happened the special duty was not in the least dangerous!

"Well," observed the soldier-servant obstinately, "I hope you'll ask the C.O. to let me go. I'm going, sir, wherever you go. And—that's flat. Wife or no wife. If an old gentleman like you can go, a young fellow like me can. And I'm your servant; and it'll be a shame if you leave me behind."

Of course the reader, knowing that there was to be no danger, will laugh: but the Ancient, who hadn't the reader's advantages, and felt oddly sure that he would not return to the unit, did not feel at all inclined to laugh at the young man's insistence. He was a big, rather hard-bitten Lancashire man, not soft-spoken or expansive. It was the first time his master had imagined him to be at all specially devoted.

A couple of hours went by. The other troops had moved on. Our own unit had drawn off into a flat stubble-field—more like a ploughed field—between two villages.

About two o'clock the C.O. came again and said to the Ancient:

"We expect a very large number of wounded —not only to-day, but for some time. Major O., Capt. H., and Mr. M. are going to run a hospital in B., the town we passed through this morning: and I want you to go in first and take over the building from the French authorities. The

A.D.M.S. will take you in his car. He is going now."

Then the Ancient did ask to take his servant with him.

The building proved to be a very large school, consisting of several blocks with huge halls. A certain number of bedsteads—perhaps 80—had already been sent in, with their mattresses: and a number of French women soon appeared eager to lend other bedding. None looked rich, many quite poor, and the Ancient felt bound to explain that any beds, *duvets*, etc., lent would certainly be ruined, soaked with blood, etc. But it made no difference; these good creatures went off and came back hauling in all and more than all that they could give.

Presently the other officers arrived, and soon the wounded began to come in, in great numbers. During the thirteen days we remained more than twelve hundred passed through our hands. Our doctors were operating incessantly: the work in the wards was shared by young volunteer doctors, and some not full-blown doctors, I think, from England. They were charming fellows, and their sympathy and goodness was splendid and touching. Major O. was now my temporary C.O., and he proved a very pleasant one, always good-tempered, though harassed by an immense

responsibility and an appalling glut of work. His organization was excellent, and he never fussed or harried anyone. Yet he had not nearly enough men, and had to get out of those he had far more than a reasonable amount of work. Of course we had no nurses, and only the orderlies of one section of a Field Ambulance—about eight non-commissioned officers and men, for day work and night work, and the immense clerical work. Under such circumstances a chaplain could only turn himself into an orderly too, and there was an immensity of work, and very beautiful and entrancing work.

In the town were four hospitals. Our own to which one was really attached: a French voluntary hospital under the care of the Dames de France; the French Hospice Civil et Militaire, with two huge wards for English wounded only, under the care of Lieutenant M. ("A Surgeon in Khaki"); and an enormous English hospital far away at the other side of the town, with no Catholic chaplain. So that the Ancient's short legs had plenty of running about.

As to the Hospice, where he said his daily Mass, he felt no great responsibility, for it was under Franciscan nuns, two of whom were Irish, and had a chaplain, the Abbé Buchendhomme, who talked English as well as he did, and was

beyond all praise devoted and tender to the English wounded. Still it had to be visited regularly.

In the hospital of the Dames de France were certain wounded French soldiers known to the Ancient whom he visited rather for pleasure than out of responsibility. But the other big English hospital had no Catholic chaplain, and that had to be visited at least daily. So that altogether a twenty-four-hour day was always too short.

Our own wounded in all three hospitals were marvels of courage and patience. It would take much more space than this whole article to instance their most touching and splendid excellence as patients. In both English hospitals we had a certain number of German wounded, and as a rule they made far "heavier weather" over their wounds. Not always though.

One night, about two o'clock after midnight, a very tall young German, of quite splendid physique, was carried in, shot through the chest; it was the Ancient's lot to tend him: and he did it with a perfectly weird sense of reverence, for the young man looked absolutely like certain pictures familiar to all Christians. His long, dark nut-brown hair, his rich but not very long beard, of a much darker tinge, but still not

black, still with chestnut-red glints in it; the fathomless sad eyes, grave, inward, upward, pitiful, ineffably noble and majestic, yet gentle and terribly humble; the mouth exquisitely tender, spiritual, pure, sensitive to anguish, and full of compassion. I say it was weird; the weirdest thing that ever came my way.

"Taller by the shoulders than all the people . . . the most beautiful of the Children of Men. . . ." God knows what phrases of the prophets came knocking at the old priest's memory as he tended that stricken stranger. The poor fellow was starved, and the old man fed him, and suddenly whispered:

"*Evangelisch oder Katholisch?*"

"*Katholisch. . . .*"

And he confessed himself.

Just as he had finished, one of the young doctors from England I have mentioned came near, and said: "Can I help you?"

He also was struck instantly by the amazing resemblance to the pictures of tradition. A look of almost embarrassed wonder showed in his face.

"Do you also notice it?" whispered the Ancient in English.

"Who could help noticing it!"

In the other English hospital there were more

German wounded, and some terrible cases. These were very patient. Only they made it all more fearfully harassing by their appalling German sentimentalism that stood as it were spectator of their own misery.

In the very large English hospital at the other end of the town was one ward in which was placed only men of whose recovery there seemed little hope. It was a sad place to visit: only too well filled always.

One day, almost immediately on entering it, the Ancient was summoned by a series of very peremptory nods and beckonings to a mere boy, pathetically childish-looking, who was sitting up, the better to attract attention, in the middle of his stretcher. He was badly shot in the head, and his bandages had a queer caricaturish resemblance to a turban: coming down a little over one eye, it caused him to hold his head sideways, and peer up sideways in an inquisitive alert fashion that was like a starling. There was not much of him, and what there was was very lean.

"*Kommen Sie hier,*" he kept calling, with volleys of smiles. "*Ich wünsche sprechen zu Ihnen. Sie sind Katholisch? Ja! Prelât? Ja, ja: ich verstehe.*"

He was full of impatience. He had been, he

said, looking out for a priest, and offering all the money he had to the orderlies to bring him one. They had assured him that he would soon get one for nothing, but he had not been quite ready to believe. He thought they might only want to save themselves trouble. He said he was not quite sixteen, and he certainly only looked fifteen: a most merry creature, though he fully realized that he was probably going to die.

"Now!" he cried, triumphantly, "I'm going to confess!"

And he did, in no subdued tones; with extraordinary preparation, and with a most touching boyish simplicity and devotion.

All the time he knelt up in the middle of his stretcher, his little face full of "recollection," his small thin hands clasped, the bright black eyes tightly closed.

"Now!" he said decisively, when he had been absolved. "Now, that part's done. Now—anoint me, please."

He stretched himself out as flat—as flat, alas! as if he had been in a coffin. And eagerly turned to the priest each part that was to be anointed.

" And now!" when that was finished, "now, my Father—give me Our Lord!"

"Yes, dear little son: but I must go to a church and . . . ."

"Well, go! Go, Father; be quick. It wouldn't do to die till you come back."

He didn't look like dying so soon: but still there might be no time to lose, and the priest went, bringing back with him more than one Host, as there were several terrible-looking cases.

When the little lad had received the Holy Viaticum he smiled and said:

"Now it's all right. . . . *Auf wiedersehen, mein Vater!*"

And the priest turned to move among the dying to seek for others of his own.

The only other, actually dying, who was a Catholic was also German. He was dying of a fearful abdominal wound, and for him there seemed almost no hope. He never ceased to move his head, in a ghastly rhythm, from side to side as he spoke, and he spoke very much. He also had evidently prepared himself for confession with as much patient care as though he had been in a Retreat: he made it with intense fervour, and received Extreme Unction with the same absorption of reverence: then Holy Viaticum. Then the priest read German prayers for him, out of the book he knew he would find in the lad's pocket: a wonderful little book—

prayers for everything, for the Sacraments, for Mass, for occasions when neither Sacrament or Mass was available, for morning when on the line of march, for night when the day's march was over, for use before a battle, for use after a victorious action, for use after a battle that had not been victorious, for use when wounded, for use in hospital, for use when death should be drawing near.

"I am sorry," said the old priest at last, "that I read the German so badly. I have almost entirely forgotten it."

"Yes. You read it badly, but I can understand."

Then he started to talk and talked for a long time. Something in this wise:

"My name is Anton Schuster.* From Wildbad in Westphalia. I am twenty years old—nearly. My father and mother are alive: and I have seven brothers and sisters. Four sisters. Three brothers." (Always that weary head turned quickly from left to right, and right to left.) "They love me, as I love them, with the whole heart. We live in a small town in a flat place. Foggy at this season. The fog comes in at dayfall from the swampy lands outside and fills the streets. Then my mother goes to the window—

* The names only are fictitious.

a long window, with plants in it. And, as she draws the curtain, she looks out—between the plants—down the two streets: for our house is at the corner of two streets. She will be doing that now—the day falls, does it not? She will do it every evening through the autumn, through the winter: and some evenings she will see, far down the street, a soldier coming home. 'Anton!' she will think in her mother-heart. 'Anton coming home. Wounded, perhaps.' But it will never be Anton. Never. The soldier will come near through the fog, and turn in at some other house. Never at our house. What day is this?"

"Tuesday, dear son."

"And on Friday I should be twenty. But there will be no Friday for me. I shall never be twenty. And how old are you, my Father?"

" Fifty-six years old."

"And you will live, perhaps, thirty more. I should be fifty then. Only I shall have been dead thirty years. And the war will be an old thing in history; and when you die too it will not be in a strange land—is this France? or Belgium, or where?"

"France, my little son."

"You will not die among enemies who hate you! Who curse you and——"

"Do you think I hate you? You must see that I love you, my poor, poor son."

"Ah, *you!* Yes. You are a priest, my Father. Priests can love everybody. But the rest here—they hate, hate, hate me."

"Has not everyone been kind to you?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. Quite. Very kind. But *outside* . . . they hate me: and to-morrow I shall be carried outside."

The weary head moved to and fro with a passion of horror.

"Anton! Do you give yourself any chance? Try not to torment yourself. Try to sleep."

"To sleep! What a hurry you are in. I shall sleep soon enough, and long enough. When I sleep I shall never wake. Our mother used to come and waken me—to get up and work: the honest, hard, kind work. *She* will not wake me this time."

"It will be your Father this time. And *Gottes-Mutter.*"

Very, very long the sad youth went on, never tiring of his frightful spectatorship of his own sadness.

Next morning I found he was dead: the other lad not dead, but sufficiently recovered to have been sent away down the line to a base hospital.

That evening there were eleven to bury: when the priest had finished the Office, he turned from the long sad trench, and was taking off his stole.

"But," said the *custode* of the cemetery, "there is the German. He also was, they say, a Catholic."

"Is he not among *those?*"

"He? No. He is to be put over there."

He pointed to a corner of the great field of death, a *Haceldama* for that alien stranger.

The little procession of English soldiers, bearing the dead German youth, moved silently towards the place. The English and Germans, less than a league away, gave him minute guns all unknowingly, the dull October dusk fell drearily. Perhaps at that moment Anton's mother was looking through the plants at her window. During the burial of the English and French dead a large group of French women had stood reverently by. Most of them had gone away then: the few who stayed were of the hard, hard *tricoteuses* type, and did not stay for love. They moved also towards that alien corner, and, as the poor body of the lad was laid into its place, some of them hissed.

It was a comfort to see the scared, horrified faces of the English soldiers.

I earnestly hope no reader will think those hissing women typical of the French heart.

Long afterwards in another cemetery the Ancient thanked a very gentle French lady who spent all her spare time decking the graves of the hundred English soldiers buried there. It was a work of pure tenderness and charity: she knew well that their friends could never know, could never see what she did, and thank her.

"That," she said simply, "is why I do it. They cannot come: those wives, and mothers, and sisters. I have to be the mother and sister of these sleepers."

" And he ?" asked the Ancient, pointing.

There was one wooden cross, with a German officer's name upon it; he also had died, among the English, and been buried among them. His cross was like the others, but the French custom is to paint a tear upon the cross, and there was one on each English cross, on the German none: and on the German grave only the red sand, no plant or flower.

"He? Ah, Monsieur, he was an enemy," urged the gentle little lady.

"In the grave there are no enemies."

Next time the Ancient came there he saw that that stranger's grave was no longer bare. Patriot, flaming patriot, as every French woman is, she had set sweet herbs to grow upon it, and pansies.

"'Pansies for thoughts,'" thought the Ancient.

VIII

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST?

ONE afternoon about six o'clock the A.D.M.S.—Assistant Director of Medical Services, that is to say the principal Medical Officer of the Division—came to the Ancient and said:

"To-night, at any moment in fact, we may expect a considerable number of wounded, and we have only this field to receive them in."

The field was, so far as beauty of surroundings went, exquisitely situated: flat itself, it formed the table of a little plateau from which steep grassy meadows fell to a rich river-bottom, beyond which were hanging woods. But, lovely as the scene around was, the situation was particularly exposed: it was entirely bare of cover and jutted out into the valley: the woods were full of batteries, themselves of course the object of continual bombardment; and enemy aircraft had been continually hovering over the field itself, and continually driven away by our own anti-aircraft bombs.

"I should like," said the A.D.M.S., "to find some better place for the wounded. Can you help us?"

"I will try. I will go at once and see. But I have been exploring the little town and I did not notice any building likely to contain large rooms. There seems to be no chateau. But there is a school and there is a church. I expect it will have to be one of them."

He went off at once to make a more diligent search, and found just what he had expected, no house that promised anything. There were several villas, prosperous the day before yesterday, now all disordered and dishonoured, none with any large hall or room. The other houses were very small, and had mostly a deserted air, for the Germans had only left that morning and their inhabitants had fled and were not yet returned.

The school was a tall, old-fashioned building consisting apparently of many little rooms on several floors. To carry wounded men up a narrow staircase would be out of the question.

There only remained the church: and the Ancient had some difficulty in finding the keys of it. The priest was away fighting for France, the Mayor had gone away on the arrival of the Germans, and there was hardly a soul about.

There really were people in some of the houses, but they were still unwilling to show themselves. They knew that the battle was being fought hard by and did not know who would win it: if it should be the Germans of course the dreaded enemy would come back.

However the Ancient went into one of these little houses, the door of which was not locked, and in an out-house at the back he found an old man cowering on the ground, half-covered with straw, and hiding behind a very small cow. At first he did not seem disposed for conversation: he was perhaps a little deaf, and he was certainly very much frightened.

"Are you all alone?" asked the Ancient.

The old man only grunted. Either he had not heard or he thought "least said is soonest mended."

The Ancient went close up to him and said: "Courage, my friend. I am only an old person myself, an English priest; you needn't be afraid. There are no Boches here, only some English troops."

"Many?"

"No. Not very many."

"I wish there were fifty thousand. But there is only this one cow."

"We do not want your cow; we don't want

anything. But I want to know how I can get into the church. I am going to make it into a hospital for the wounded."

The old man slowly stood up; he was evidently stiff; his poor bones were rheumatic, and I dare say he had been cowering there, afraid to stir, for a day and a night.

"Where," asked the Ancient carelessly, "is your wife?"

"Where there are no Boches: in heaven."

"And you live alone? Is there no one else?"

"There is," said the old man slowly, "my grandson. His father is at the war."

The Ancient peered about for the grandson.

"He," whispered the old man, "is . . . behind the rabbits."

He was giving some hay to the cow, who appeared to have an excellent appetite.

The Ancient went out of the little shed and searched for the grandson. There was a tiny garden, and at the end of it some currant bushes, rank and barren-looking. Behind them, on a sort of tressle, were half a dozen rabbit-hutches; behind the hutches were some remarkably fine nettles. Cowering among the nettles was a thin boy with a white face and terrified eyes.

"Come! you need not be afraid," said the

Ancient repeating his formula, "I am an English priest. I belong to the English Army. Do come out. What is your name?"

"Guillaume," stammered the boy, and the Ancient at once perceived that it was a lie. During the horrible eternity of hours the lad had been squatting there among the nettles his poor wits had been devising this piteous little *ruse*. Perhaps the Boches, if they found him, would not kill the Emperor's name-sake.

As he could not cry, the Ancient laughed.

"I'm sure your grandfather doesn't call you that," he said, with decision. "He is all right. No one has hurt him: no one is going to. The English are here. He is feeding the cow. What does *he* call you?"

"François."

"That is my name too. I want to get into the church. Who has a key? The Mayor has saved himself: there is no priest."

"The priest is fighting."

"Yes, I know. I know he did not run away. Is there any other key? I want to arrange a hospital in the church. But I can't get in. Do help me."

"I know how to get in. I know where there is a key. The sacristan is my uncle. Not old, like most sacristans, and he has gone to the war.

But I lost a key: I used to help him, and he gave me sous. But I lost the key, and I only found it three day ago. You really are English? Why do you talk French?''

''Because I supose you do not talk English. Come François.''

His grandfather had hobbled down and said: ''See, he has only one hand. The other was nearly cut off on a chaff-cutter, when he was seven years old, and it turned out bad. They had to cut it off. If the Boches had found him they would have cut off the other and his head to make up for his not having two. It is, as Monsieur knows, their custom to cut off boys' hands. Finding only one they would naturally cut off this boy's head—to make up.''

François shook with terror.

''It is no use telling him such things,'' urged the Ancient. ''Besides we are not to suppose that all Boches are equally cruel.''

The old man trembled now.

''You are sure,'' he quavered miserably, ''that you are English?''

'' Absolutely sure. I never liked the Germans. But it is absurd to think they are all devils.''

'' It is anyway clear,'' said the grandfather, ''that Monsieur is not French.''

The Ancient knew very well that the old fellow

was not alluding to his accent, but he said cheerfully:

"I know my tongue is not. But my heart is."

They were all three walking up the little garden. It was growing dusk. All the while came the ugly, angry noise of fierce artillery-fire.

"François," said the Ancient, "do be quick. I want that key. I have lost a lot of time."

The key was in a pair of blue cotton trousers hung behind the door in the cottage.

"There is nothing in this cottage," observed the old man earnestly, "except what you see. No money. We have none. Money is in rich people's houses."

"I wonder," thought the Ancient, "where it is."

It seemed a good thing that the Germans had *not* come there; the poor old fellow would have said just the same things.

There were no lights in any of the cottages. But a few women had crept out. They must have seen from some peeping-holes the Ancient go into the cottage where Francois and his grandfather lived.

"Mesdames," said the Ancient, sick of his formula ,"François is going to open the church for me. I am going to arrange a little hospital in it. I am an English priest. We expect many

wounded. Is there anything you could bring me?"

Poor creatures! They had been cowed; and had cause, no doubt, for weary anxiety still: who could tell how this battle would go? But they were French, and full of generosity; and were wives, or sisters, or mothers of soldiers.

"What does Monsieur want?" asked a woman with a fine but not very gentle face. She was perhaps the last to whom, of all the little group that had gathered round him, the Ancient would have appealed. Thus we are stupid, and judge good books by their austere binding.

"Ah, Madame! What do I not want? There is the church—and that is all. To lay a shattered *brave* down on the hard flags—that also is hard."

"Of the hardest. Come, Mesdames!"

And the hard-featured woman assumed command. They all went off after her. In ten minutes they, and others whom they had enlisted, brought the Ancient twenty-seven mattresses, nearly fifty blankets; and in half an hour they had brought him, in all, forty-eight mattresses or beds, over sixty blankets and *duvets*, many pillows, and milk, wine and eggs and a little cognac—and they had hardly dared to eat all day or all the day before.

"It is poor people's stuff," said Madame of the hard face, "but, Monsieur, it is all we have."

"I cannot thank you. God must. Your French St. Martin gave Jesus Christ half his cloak, and how He boasted of it in Heaven that night! He is showing these beds to St. Martin, and St. Denis, and St. Rémy now, and saying, 'Look what your daughters have given me to lie upon—their own beds: their only beds: the beds whereon their babies were born.' Eh, Mesdames, He will be proud of His Church's eldest daughter."

"Ah! Monsieur, then, is Catholic too? *Tant mieux!* We did not know for sure. English Pasteurs come and say they are Catholic, and afterwards we find they are not of our faith. We thought you might be a pasteur also. But we knew you wanted what we could give *pour vos braves:* it was enough: your soldiers come here and are killed for us. It is not much that we give an old bed for them to die on."

"Now," said another woman, "shall we help you? You are alone to do everything—and have you done all that?"

"Yes. I had to do something while I waited: but I was not alone, François helped me. There would not be room in the aisles, so we moved all the benches. François with his one hand does

as much as two men with two hands each." He had indeed worked like a Trojan: and his old grandfather helped too. He had a rather rough old tongue now he had found it.

"It is a pity," he had observed, pointing a rheumatic finger at the pulpit, "that M. l'Abbé cannot be there to preach. That would help the wounded to sleep."

The little church soon began to look quite like a hospital. The beds lay in rows up the nave and south aisle—the north was full of the benches and chairs. Also the two chapels made tiny wards.

"I will go and finish making my soup," said Madame of the hard face, "it will be hot, and perhaps the poor men will like it, though it is only *our* soup, not *grande chose,* you understand."

"I also have some soup nearly ready," another woman declared; "it isn't splendid but it has a hen in it. My old man was frightened when a shell fell in the paddock and tumbled over on her. He is heavy, my *bonhomme, and she was écrasée,* so I undressed her and put her in the pot."

"Look here," said the Ancient, "it is a shame to steal your soup——"

"Sh! When the thief is given leave he becomes an honest man," declared the hard-

faced woman; whose name, by the way, proved to be Madame Martel.

"Yes. But listen. I know this soup is for your dinners, and for the dinners of your families. But see, I have here this packet. It contains English stuff called Oxo, each of the little cubes will make half a *litre* of soup. But it needs boiling water and I have none. Will you take the cubes—there are a hundred of them—and make soup of them for me, between you, and bring it here when I am ready for it?"

"We will mix it with some of our thin soup, and the vegetables will make it better."

"Very well. It is most singularly good of you to take so much trouble."

"And you? You are not precisely a little boy. The work has made Monsieur very hot."

"And very dirty. But that doesn't matter, Doesn't this chapel make a nice little ward?"

"Yes. It is a pity She" (with a nod at the Blessed Virgin's statue) "can't come down to *soigner* the wounded. She would like that. She is a Mother and knows what it is like to see her Son hurt."

This again was Madame Martel. She and the Ancient were now alone in the little chapel.

"You have sons?"

"Two. They are both at the war. They are twins—Philippe and Philippin."

"May they both come home safe and sound. I will say Mass for them."

"Monsieur," she said quietly, "for Philippe the Mass should be *en noir*. He was killed the first day."

She did not sob, nor were her eyes wet.

"Monsieur," she said, touching the priest's arm, "do not weep. *Heureux ceux qui meurent pour la patrie.* Out of the soil of this France we who are peasants live. She feeds her children from her breast. She has a right to her sons' lives. They die to save that mother's breast from pollution. *Heureux ceux qui meurent pour la patrie: heureux ceux qui pleurent pour les braves.* My lad's blood will wash out the stain of one German footstep anyway. I go to make the soup."

It was nearly dark now in the church: they had lighted a few lamps, and one of them was set on the steps of the pulpit. François was seated there waiting to be told what he should do next: a girl was talking to him in a low voice.

Her head was swathed in hideous bandages, and horrible straps of plaster were stuck across her face: one of them entirely covered the right eye.

"How did you get hurt?" the Ancient asked her gently.

"I am not hurt. I did it myself—and my mother helped me."

She moved away, and the Ancient saw that she was very lame.

"Monsieur," whispered Francois, "she was afraid of the Boches. She is beautiful, only she is lame and can only walk a little and slowly. She had splendid hair—lots of it. She cut it all off, in jags, close to the skull, and made herself horrible with those bandages. It was her old uncle, Monsieur Fère of the pharmacie, who gave her the plaster. She is frightful, is she not? I suppose she is ashamed. And she is vain and dresses very prettily, and she is of the most clean. She is ashamed of those filthy rags in which she dressed herself."

Was she? Perhaps; for we are always being ashamed of the wrong things.

"Look Monsieur," said François, with a tug at the Ancient's coat, "two English officers who are at the door."

They came to see what had been done, and were full of commendation.

"Jeanne Fère is ashamed lest they see her," whispered François. "See she hides behind the door till she can slip out. If Philippin Martel

came home quickly from the war; what would she do if he came before her hair grew? She is betrothed to Philippin Martel."

The English officers went round the church, praised what had been done, and went away.* No wounded, they reported, had come in yet.

"Monsieur," asked one of the women, coming down the little *place* on which the church stood, "are you not hungry? I could make an *omelette.*"

"Not hungry at all, but filthy. Could you lend me a *cuvette,* with water and soap?"

"Of course. But Monsieur, only the angels can see in this light: and they don't mind. Clean hearts and dirty hands often go together. *Mon Dieu!* what is that?"

Nothing very strange: only a shell that had fallen on a tallish house down the street, perhaps a hundred yards away; not in the direction of our field but eastward of the church—if the altar was duly orientated. Soon another fell nearer to the church, and it became apparent that the Germans were now making the church a mark; it stood high on the edge of a steep bluff at the end of the *place.* It seemed obvious that they were not only aiming at the church but getting the range.

* They are both killed now.

The lamps inside the church were feeble enough, and so far did not light up the windows: but when it should be quite dark they might. It seemed best to the Ancient to go in and put them all out, one by one, which he did.

He guessed already that the little hospital the women had furnished with beds would never be used. The place would be considered too dangerous. And so it proved.

He went and reported to the orderly officer of the A.D.M.S., a very kind and friendly Major.

"All your trouble for nothing," he said regretfully, "it would have been an excellent little dressing-station; but the field, when it is quite dark, will be safer. I'm afraid we shall have to give up the church."

The A.D.M.S. decided that it must be so.

And so all the labour of love of those poor women was wasted—"Or else, no," as they say in Scotland.

IX

FRENCH WINDOWS

From the 18th to the 31st of October (1914) the Ancient was, as has been told in the seventh of these papers, helping certain officers of his unit to carry on a Clearing Hospital at B., an old town of what was once Spanish Flanders—and is now a part of the French Department of the Nord. Besides our own there was, quite at the other end of the town, another very large Clearing Hospital for British troops, and this, having no Catholic Chaplain of its own, though not officially in his care, did actually during those days form part of the Ancient's charge. Not far from it was a much smaller hospital, carried on by the Dames de France, and visited by the Ancient because certain of its patients had originally been brought in from the battle-field to our own hospital, and kept by us for several days. Of them a word presently. There was a fourth hospital, called the Hospic Civil et Militaire. In peace time it was simply a

hospice for old men and women, in charge of Franciscan nuns, and much resembling a Convent of Little Sisters of the Poor. Just before the war began, however, immense additions had been made to it, and the nuns immediately handed over the new block for the reception of wounded soldiers, they themselves undertaking the nursing, in addition to their already heavy work in the care of their regular inmates, who remained in an earlier, but quite modern and excellent, wing. The Sisters continued to inhabit the very old, and I should say much worse than obsolete, portion of the buildings (dating from the sixteenth or early seventeenth century) nearest the street: noisy, close, airless, dark, and dismal. These buildings were crowded round a small and gloomy courtyard, and one only had to glance at them to appreciate the self-sacrifice of those devoted and noble women. They were *all* excellent, but their Superioress was a quite remarkable person, capable, ever-ready, and a first-rate organizer. She was a trained anæsthetist, and almost nightly would be at work in the operating theatre till it was night no longer, and then would take a very brief sleep; she was always in chapel in her place, when the Ancient went to say Mass there at half-past six or seven. To her Queen Alexandra wrote a very gracious

and kindly letter, thanking her and her nuns for their care of the English soldiers: for two large wards had been given over entirely to our wounded, while wounded English officers were welcomed in other parts of the hospice. One of our Medical Officers, a genial and very clever New Zealander, had charge of these cases, and was a skilled operator. I do not propose to say more of him and his work at B. lest it should seem that he and I were playing a very popular game, for in his book "A Surgeon in Khaki" he has had far too much to say of "Monsignor."*

Those Masses in the hospice chapel one will not easily forget. There were the nuns—most of whom had been at work half, and more than half, the night, and all the long day before: some of whom were too old for *any* work, and crept slowly to their places, with failing step that would soon carry them on a very long journey: into the gathering silence of their last days here had burst the terrible clatter and din of war.

There were good folk from the town; almost all in deep mourning. And almost always there were tressels before the altar, on which lay a young hero's coffin presently to be carried out to its final rest. Sometimes there were two or three, sometimes half a dozen. Draped with the

* He has been killed since these words were written.

Tricolour, those silent heroes seemed praying for the soil of France to be purged from the *Sang Impur* that stained it; their deaths prayed for it.

One morning a Lancashire soldier went with the Ancient to hear that Mass. His stalwart frame stood up pretty high above the old bent figures of fathers come to pray for the sons they had given to France. A quick, involuntary, sidewards shake of the head gave a very simple, eloquent tribute of pity and respect. He looked beyond that little patient, mourning crowd, to the veiled circle of the nuns. Then they sang, and the rather weird thin music was all a threnody, unmistakable, and a cry to Christ for France.

"What did you think of it?" the Ancient asked him at the end.

"I never saw the like," he answered, and somehow it was enough.

"Eh!" he said later on, still with that sidewards abrupt head-shake, "England isn't *cut* like that."

One afternoon he went with his master to go round the whole of that hospital, carrying a sack containing about five thousand cigarettes. Of course it took a long time, as the wards seemed countless, and each soldier liked to have his cigarettes given to him individually, and natur-

ally wished to talk a little. The extreme comfort, the exquisite cleanliness, and the perfect peace and stillness of those light, lofty, airy and yet well-warmed wards immensely impressed the young Lancashire man. It was abundantly clear on what a kindly and sympathetic footing the nuns were with their soldier-patients: and what specially touched the young Englishman was that the lads who helped the Sisters as *brancardiers* in the wards were ecclesiastical students, who had to lay aside for awhile their treaties to read in this great book of charity.

French soldiers are always delighted to get hold of English cigarettes, and they seemed even more pleased to have the chance of talking with an Englishman who was at once a priest and an officer. To him the only drawback was that the talk had to be so brief. (It must be borne in mind that this was only a visit of friendliness: they had a perfectly devoted, most kind and large-hearted, French chaplain of their own.) For they were quite delightful: and as ready to open their hearts as their mouths. Each of them was a different window opened into that splendid and gracious thing the heart of the French people, and giving each a different glimpse of character, surroundings, calling, and locality. For there were lads and fathers of

families, "educated" and uneducated, blond and stalwart Normans, dark and lean southerners, Parisians, Lyonnais, Marseillais, Gascons, men from the western sea-board, mountaineers from Alps and Pyrenees, *cultivateurs* and clerks, sons of the château and of the slum, merry-eyed Provençaux, and wistful-faced youths from the solemn and silent *landes*. It would have been fascinating employment for an afternoon to sit by any one of them, and enjoy the generously given confidence, to look leisurely at the home-pictures deftly painted in a word or two, and change into a friendship what could only be the realization that it was worth having and freely offered: to hurry on was abominable, and it was hard to turn back at the door of the ward to see such friendly eyes watch one's going, such intimate and kindly little gestures of farewell, and hearing so tempting a chorus of "*Au revoir, Monsieur! A tantôt!*"

"*Au revoir, mes gosses, bien sur! quelque part, quelque temps. Au revoir.*"

Ah where? Ah when?

That was the worst of those terribly crowded days at B.—the hurry: for the work in our own hospital was always much more than enough to keep one very busy indeed, and the visits to the other three hospitals had to be snatched from

the time belonging to it, in something the fashion in which some housekeepers squeeze money for good works out of the housekeeping money they have to administer! When setting out from his own hospital, to dash off to one of the others, the Ancient always had an uneasy sense that he ought not to go at all, and at each of the others he felt that he ought to stay here and not go back at all.

As to the French wounded brought in among our own men from the battle-field to our hospital, four or five became specially friends of the Ancient, and are friends still, writing to him very regularly. One was a young Sergeant, from Savoie; very dark, with great black eyes that, when they were not singularly gentle and tender, looked fierce and quarrelsome. He was almost black with smoke and dust when he came in; he had had no means of washing for a week, and later on the Ancient perceived that he was extremely *coquet,* half a dandy, and that the grime and filth had annoyed him even more than the very bad wound in his hip. He was grateful, out of all proportion, for the little *soins* the Ancient was able to render him: and his thanks were voluble to eloquence.

"I believe," said the Ancient laughing, "that talking is your trade."

"So it is. I am *comme métier, commis-voyageur.*"

All the same it was not quite easy to picture him as a commercial traveller. He was *all over* a young warrior, and rather a blood-thirsty looking one. It would have made a conscientious objector feel creepy to hear him talk of Germans, and tell of things he had seen; and for my part I thought it much healthier to be an Englishman making soup for him than a Boche asking him for quarter. I could too distinctly hear him say with those blazing eyes of his, "As for your soul, ask the Bon Dieu to take it, if he likes it. For me, I am preventing your body from doing any more harm." He was a lonely person: not, he said, apt to make friends. He had one great love—for his mother.

"You see," he said once, "she has no one else. I am all the child she has. And I never had a father. He *must* have been bad: for she is good, look you, good, good, good. A dog of a gentleman, he. And it is I who stand between her and a broken heart. Please do not say anything. Only if I go back, and then do *not* come back—write to her. Eh?"

He never seemed to sleep; for, at whatever hour of the night the Ancient came into the ward, those gaunt eyes were turned to the door, wide

open, and burning like a black fire. In another place I hope to tell how tenderly he did for me a work of gracious charity.

A very different lad was a young Norman *cultivateur* who came in on the same night. The Ancient found him lying on a stretcher in a very large and very crowded ward. Only a third of the wounded could be given any sort of bed: the rest lay on the floor, on straw or on the stretchers in which they had been brought in. He was wounded in the thigh, and suffered plenty of pain, but quite stolidly. He never asked for anything, or seemed to expect anything.

"Are you hungry or thirsty?" asked the Ancient, kneeling down in the corner (it was almost behind a door) by his side.

"All the two, Monsieur. But that makes nothing."

"I can't make much either, but I can make coffee and soup, and I'll go and do it."

He seemed mildly surprised, and he mildly smiled. When they were brought he watched the Ancient over the brim of the cup, as a horse might watch the man who had brought him unexpected hay, over the edge of a manger.

"I am sure," said the Ancient, "you are Norman."

"It is that."

"*Cultivateur?*"

"Yes. Who told you?"

"The look of your big hands."

"I am from St. Martin l'Eglise. Widow Guilbert is my mother. She keeps the little coffee-shop at the corner past the bridge. There is a little land. I work on it. Henri too. Only he is doing *this:* like me. I am Charles."

"Your brother, Henri ?"

"Matilde's husband."

"Is Madame Matilde your only sister ?"

"There is also Gervaise, but she died three days before the Day of the Kings. Jean is doing *this:* like me."

"He is husband of Madame Gervaise ?"

"That is it:—Eh, but I was cold. That warms the stomach."

"Yes. But you must have blankets——"

"Monsieur also makes blankets! Is the war nearly finished ?"

"God knows that! I'm going to get blankets. Then you can sleep."

He was a *Chasseur à Cheval.* And when the Ancient came back Charles Guilbert said:

"My horse was killed; *ça m'embête. He* hadn't done any harm to Guillaume."

"Nor you either, for that matter," said the Ancient laughing.

"No. But I would if I could. He has caused them to kill my horse. I like horses best. They do not mock themselves of one, if one is *bête*. When you go to Mass the people round the church, outside, amuse themselves thus; *ça m'embête*. Most of all when girls do it. I find that out of place. For girls are only a sort of men, less strong, and expect much help in the fields when it is harvest. Then they mock themselves of you (when they are all together and you go by, and they need no help any more). Do you find that right?"

"Oh no! I suppose there is one worse than the others?"

"You know that also? Philomène is the worst. And it is she who expects most help in harvest time."

"A disagreeable girl, evidently."

"Perhaps not. You know Normandy well?"

"Very little indeed. But my people came from there—from very near your *pays:* from Arques la Bataille."

"From Arques! The next *pays.*"

And so for ever so long Charles Guilbert talked, and was happy, of his home, and his work in the fields (sighing to get back to it), and a certain small brother Philippin. Long afterwards Philippin crept up on to the

Ancient's knee, in the neat, plain, prosperous Norman home, to ask whispered questions about Charles *à la guerre.*

But the Ancient never saw Philomène, and the Veuve Guilbert sniffed when he inquired casually concerning that young woman's health.

Meanwhile, in the ward at B., Charles talked with contented eyes of toil and home, and you would never have thought that he had a lump of "skrapnel," as he called it, in his thigh.

I am getting on rather slowly. But that was what one always felt; one was getting on very slowly, with so much to do. And if you hurry too much, lonely creatures don't get much comfort out of you. I think a wounded French lad, in a crowded English hospital, where no one talks French, is apt to feel lonely; and it seems to me that God, who has all Eternity to do things in, must be patient with an old man who has but a very little time. It never worried one to fancy that He was saying, "Why aren't you doing something else?" if the thing being done had cropped up, and was a decent thing in its way.

It must not be imagined that only the French wounded were grateful and gracious for the small homely services rendered to them. Our own, English, Irish, and Scots, were just as kind. It was a very busy but a very happy time, if one

can say that decently of a time during which one saw so much suffering. It had its little jokes too, as when a young soldier, whose own clothes had been torn to ribbons and utterly spoiled by blood and dirt, set forth from the hospital, for the train that was to take him to Boulogne, in an uncommonly shabby black coat and a pair of black trousers that made knicker-bocker breeches on his unduly long legs. He was quite unperturbed by the chaff that his rig occasioned, and assumed a certain clerical air that was far funnier than his trousers.

The end of those days came, as everything came, rather suddenly. And one foggy morning (with a promise of sun, however) we marched away from B. to rejoin our headquarters wherever we could find them.

We passed through three villages that day, and in the first we had our first sight of the Indian troops. About four in the afternoon we came to M., a considerable village, of one long and wide street, whose houses were substantial and comfortable-looking. At a *largo,* as it would be called in Naples, stood the church, large and fine; and at right angles to it, a bit further down the hill, the *Mairie.* We sought the Mayor within, to arrange about billets, and found him —a crooked, crunched-up, weazened, preposter-

ously-cranky-looking personage, with a brown death's-head for a face, and awful hands with talons for fingers. Those fingers were bent and twisted in all directions, as were his lean legs, as were his flappy ears—as were all his features.

He looked absurdly eighteenth-century—old before the Revolution, but not too old, when it came, to enjoy with all his twisted being the denouncing of royalists.

He looked so exaggeratedly unpleasant that it was impossible not to feel convinced that he must be pleasanter than his looks. Still, he was not pleasant, and he was far from desiring to seem so. Ultimately, however, he gave us a ramshackle school for the men, and without his permission I discovered a place that I was quite determined should be our billet for that night. It was a chateâu, a real chateâu, just beyond the village; the house itself very large indeed, and around it what had been extensive and imposing grounds. Yet it was obvious at the first glance that it was no longer a château in the sense of being the abode of any family of position. It looked, but was not, unoccupied. None of its doors or countless windows had the air of being ever opened. It refused to have an outlook, and was cynically shut up in itself. It was not in the least ruinous; nevertheless

Ichabod was stamped all over it. The grounds must have been once the pride and pleasure of fine folk who had a taste for what was fine, and not ugly. They were now, not neglected but superseded: the parterres lay under close-cropped grass where sheep nibbled: against the statues calves rubbed themselves. There was a pretty lake with an island, and a really beautiful stone bridge led to it from the bank, itself sustained by a solid retaining wall of "rustic" stone (Inigo Jones type), topped by a handsome stone balustrade. Almost all the windows on the ground floor and first floor were shuttered—tall, wide windows such as only imposing saloons would boast. There were two higher floors.

The Ancient went back to the Mayor and asked boldly for billets at the château.

"There is abundance of room," he declared, "and we don't want anything but shelter. We have our own food, and our own bedding."

The Mayor pretended difficulties, but could not formulate them, and the billets were given.

Then the Ancient went off—it was half a mile or more away—to get possession. Passing through a sufficiently imposing gateway with a lodge beside it, he encountered an old man, who instantly proclaimed himself too deaf to hear anything—but into his ear an obvious grand-

daughter came forth from the lodge to whisper, with the best results.

"Is M. le Marquis away—at the war, perhaps?" asked the Ancient of the little girl.

(He felt convinced that M. le Marquis was as far away as the French Revolution.) ...

"There is no M. le Marquis," said the little girl.

"There was," said the grandfather.

"When?"

"Oh, *dans le temps,* when there were kings."

"It is Monsieur Chose now," said the granddaughter.

"What does he make?"

"Bicycle-saddles."

"Is he here?"

"Not yet. About seven o'clock he comes. Madame is here."

"His wife?"

"No. His wife's mother. Madame is dead. Monsieur Pierre is at the war. Monsieur Louis is here—but he is going soon. Mademoiselle will open the door."

"*Voilà,*" said the grandfather.

And the Ancient went on. At the great, stern-looking door, a singularly inhospitable-looking dog was in waiting. He resembled a wolf, and was a wolf's grandson. He had a slink-

ing manner, and beautiful teeth. His objection to any one's ringing the bell was undisguised; when the bell did ring he wailed aloud.

"I hope they'll be quick," thought the Ancient.

They were not at all quick, and it wasn't "they" at all, when it was anybody. It was Mademoiselle. A girl of fifteen, neatly dressed, with a tucked-up gown, and a smell of soft-soap hovering round her.

"I have billets, please, Mademoiselle, from the Mayor, for four officers. We shall not give you any trouble, for we have each a servant, and we bring our own food and our bedding."

"I will ask Madame."

And she shut the door, and the dog looked gratified, evidently saying, "Ah! I told you so."

"But you're quite wrong, *mon vieux,*" said the Ancient, and the dog wailed aloud.

In no hurry appeared Madame—stoutish, not unprosperous, but scarcely arrived (on the road to gentility) at the dignity of being *bourgeoise.* Neither she nor Mademoiselle were surly, but they were far from affecting geniality. However, the result was admission. A queerly tall, but most dignified hall; then a sombre and gaunt, but impressive staircase: the whole inside of the house panelled with mahogany, and the stairs

themselves and the balustrades—right up to the fourth floor—of mahogany, still highly polished and not in the least damaged, or decayed.

At each landing were immense mahogany doors, with exquisitely carved gilt locks and door-handles: every door inexorably closed, but each obviously leading to suites of vast rooms.

At the fourth floor Madame and Mademoiselle paused.

"Wherever Monsieur chooses, here," said Madame.

Even up here the rooms were fine, and they were furnished—with excellent furniture of a good period (Louis XVI.); and the wall-papers were of delightful design and still fresh—after over a hundred years: some of the rooms were not papered, but hung with damask silk.

"You see," said Madame, "there are beds enough."

Perhaps the Ancient's consuming wonder as to whose all this had been showed itself in his face, as he looked around.

"It is all my son-in-law's now," said Madame, and the Ancient asked no questions.

There was nowhere the smallest hint of occupation. There were excellent beds, in really fine bedsteads, but no bedding. And one felt a conviction that no one ever entered here, at night,

except ghosts. As for the ghosts they hardly pretended to hide themselves. Out of every mirror they seemed to peer—whereas the living look *into* mirrors.

In this sumptuous wilderness we encamped that night. But first the Ancient had to go and find the other officers; and also the Curé, to arrange about Mass in the morning.

The Curé was an old man, and very pleasant, and quite delighted at the idea of having eighty English soldiers in his church next morning. It was a fine church, and well kept; very large and crowded next morning with a devout congregation. During the Mass, said by the Ancient, the Curé mounted the pulpit and said all sorts of things out of his own head about the Ancient (for he knew nothing on earth about him) to his people, who evidently liked it. At that Mass the whole family from the château "assisted."

Afterwards the Ancient asked M. le Curé about them, but he had nothing to say out of his own head.

"Oh! Monsieur Chose—he makes bicycle-saddles. A respectable person."

"But the château—it cannot always have belonged to him."

"But no. Only since two years."

"And before the Revolution?"

"Ah: before the Revolution it belonged to M. le Marquis de la R."

And that was all that the Ancient ever could discover about a place that had "history" peering out of every corner of it. He couldn't even discover why M. Chose had cared to buy it, since he certainly could not be said to live in it—he actually did live in the kitchen.

To make public confession—I have always given way to rash judgment about M. Chose. His name was, of course, not Chose: it was a foreign name, and he was not like a Frenchman, nor was his son; nor were Madame and Mademoiselle like French women. I feel sure they were not. That is not the rash judgment. But one found German-paid folk in so many places far from Germany, and there seemed so little reason for finding M. Chose there—that one wondered. No one in the village would talk freely about them.

M. Chose and M. le Maire—were they pensioners? Pensioners of that enemy who had planted his pensioners everywhere before the war?

X

OBITER DICTA

Half an hour after Mass on that Sunday morning, which was All Saints' Day, we marched away from M. At the end of a straight bit of road with a hump in it we could see the spire of H.; the town we could not see, because of the hump. We marched straight through, and soon after eleven o'clock had rejoined the headquarters of our unit at the village of P. They were billeted in and about a small but agreeable château in a wee *parc*—which is not always in France precisely the same thing as an English park. In this instance it consisted of a small grass-plot, two cucumber-frames and a greenhouse, nineteen trees, and half an acre of kitchen garden.

After a fortnight's absence it was pleasant to meet our comrades again, and hear their news. They were not able definitely to announce the conclusion of the war, but in those early days most of us were inclined to the belief with which

Mr. Herbert Paul credits the late Charles Kingsley, "that something tremendous was going to happen about the middle of next week."

Always eager, like Mrs. Elton, to explore (though without the convenience of a barouchelandeau), the Ancient sallied forth to examine the village. It was a morning all unlike November; a July sun and an August breeze played at summer together, like two belated truants; and everything seemed laughing.

The village was full of folk, and there were many chattering groups about the church.

"Madame, can you tell me, please," asked the Ancient of a young mother with a little boy clinging to her gown, and a baby in her arms, "where M. le Curé lives?"

"Monsieur, he lives nowhere."

"Ah! he, too, no doubt, is gone to the war?"

"He is gone, Monsieur, beyond the war, where for him there is Peace."

She spoke in low tones and her eyes glanced towards a lady, swathed in new black, who passed from the churchyard. The groups of village-folk and young soldiers drew back as she went by, and they ceased chattering, with grave and reverent faces, as men do when the great King Death passes. Many uncovered, not in greeting, but for reverence.

"Monsieur," said the young mother, when that desolate and sable figure had gone by down the sunlit street, "she was his sister. She lived with him. Two weeks ago the Boches were here. Their officer went to M. le Curé—he was too old for military service, and stayed here. They asked him for the keys of the church-tower, and he explained to them that since the separation of Church and State the churches belong to the Republic, and the church-keys are in the Maire's hands. Where there is a friendly Maire the Curé is allowed to have a key of the church—but it is a courtesy. M. le Curé told them that he had not the tower-key, that it was at the Maire. Then they ordered him to stand up, and shot him. That is all."

Immediately after an early luncheon we all marched on, and did not reach our quarters for that night till after nine o'clock. Not that it was all continuous marching, for there were long blocks and waits. Our road lay, in the early afternoon, through deep and narrow lanes, and more than once we had to squeeze in close to the hedge and wait while other troops went by. Among these was a brigade of Moroccan Cavalry, coming the contrary way, so that their faces were towards us as they came winding up the hill in the bright sunshine, and we could get

a good look at them. They were not, it will be understood, French colonials, but irregular native horse, mostly Arabs, though with a notable sprinkling of jet-black Nubians. Their costumes were furiously picturesque—close-fitting jackets and very loose trousers of pale but bright blue, broad canary-coloured sashes, blood-red fez, and high boots of buff leather. The younger men were often handsome, after an insolent, barbaric fashion; the elders were mostly ill-favoured enough and of forbidding countenance, with hard and angry eyes. Even those who were young and comely had an overbearing, defiant manner—"cheeky," as I heard one of our men remark. All looked fierce and truculent. One would guess that where sheer defiant pluck might be needed they would not fall short, but that their discipline and subordination might leave something to be desired.

"And what," asked one of our young officers (an Irishman from the Black North) of the Ancient "do *you* think of them?"

"I think they make a splendid picture, but they look particularly unbaptized."

"Do *I* look unbaptized?"

"Oh, *you?* Well *mon vieux,* you look as if conditional baptism might in your case be a safe precaution."

The Moroccans would have liked to gallop through, but the lane was too narrow and too thickly packed for that. Sometimes they could trot half a dozen yards, then had to halt, then might move on at foot-pace, then trot again, and so on.

"Etes vous," demanded one of the cavaliers, who sat impatiently enough in his high saddle waiting for the block in front to lessen. "Etes vous *Sheikh?*"

"Oui, mon fils," answered the Ancient, "je suis *Sheikh* Catholique."

The lad seemed to think it rather funny. He touched his own hair, and nodded towards the Ancient's white locks, approvingly, but touched his own moustache, and looked at the Ancient's shaven lip not approvingly. To the Arab the shaven lip is shocking, scandalous. To this one it seemed perversely improper, since all the young English soldiers who were not Sheikhs were moustached.

"Notre habitude," observed the Ancient, "Maleysh-Kulloolum beni Adam."

The youth showed two rows of perfect teeth, and said:

"Salaam!"

The Ancient, looking forward, saw there would be another move.

"Hadr!" he told his cavalier.

And the lad laughed as he shook up his rein and moved on. He told the little joke to his comrades, and as they trotted forward they also laughed, turned in their saddles, shook brown hands in air in greeting, and told one another how odd it was to see an old Sheikh of the Catholics, standing thus dusty in the trampling rush of the war's wayside; but I think they rather liked it, and no true Arab despises a priest. Was not Isa bin Miriam highest of all saints?

The Ancient, watching them disappear, seemed to miss them, and bethought him of a morning in Tripoli, when an Arab had belaboured a harmless old person squatted on the steps of the church where the Ancient was about to say Mass.

"Let him be. He does no evil," the Ancient expostulated.

"He makes interruption. He gets in the way when the holy man comes to make his prayer. The great prayer is not to be impeded by the body of this one who seeks only half-pence."

What seemed queer was that the old fellow did not take at all in ill-part his own drastic removal.

"You would not," demanded the lad of

him, "cheat God of the prayers that are His?"

"No, no." And he lifted wrinkled hands of disavowal. "To God prayer. To man pity."

Well, we got on at last. Then, after but a short mile of marching, another block: and this time the Ancient climbed up into a queer little country cart, driven by one of our men, to rest and wait. The man was from the Scots Lowlands, and had the kindly burr of the north in his mouth. He soon told all about himself. "Presbyterian?" "Yes." "Of the Kirk of Scotland, or the Free Kirk, U.P.'s, or what?" "Rightly I'm a wee Free. But in the Army I'm just Presbyterian." He had four brothers, two out here, one of them killed; one in the Navy, and one, the youngest, only sixteen, "minding the mither" at home. Benjy they called him, though his right name was Alexander, because he got "aye the biggest servings at dinner." It was a mercy it was not him the Germans had killed. The brother who had fallen had an English chum who "broke" his death in a letter to Benjy. "You may conclude," said he, "that James is dead, for I saw his head blown off." "That," observed *my* one of the five brothers, "is what you may ca' leading up to it." It appeared that my one (whose name was Adam)

had been to a Catholic service once, led thither by a chum who assured him that it would divert him. "But it was na' that way at all," he declared, "I thought it pretty, and verra solemn. The minister that preached gave *me* a knock or two, though he didna ken I was there." "Perhaps the knocks came from somewhere else where they *do* know." "And that was what I was jalousin' my ain sel'. So I pirtly decided not to go again just then, as it was not entirely convenient to me to change. There's nae use exposin' the conscience till ye've a readiness to let it have its ain wull o' ye."

But if the reader is to be made to play eavesdropper to all the talk that came in the Ancient's way, we shall not get on much.

After all it was November, and, brilliant as the day had been, it had to obey the almanack and close in betimes. There was a long twilight, warm enough at first, but gathering a sharp chill as the mists began to rise over the fields. Hereabouts there were, now and then, clusters of huge and tall poles for the drying of hops; as the white fog crept in and swathed about them, and the night fell, they had a grizzly suggestion of colonies of gibbets, especially as blackened bunches of withered hops hung to many of them, swaying in the breeze. That which at noon had

been a panting zephyr came now scolding, fussy puffs with a tooth in them.

It grew so chilly that the Ancient was not sorry to get down and walk again when the "Quick March" came. He fell behind a bit to say a rosary, but men kept moving by, and he thought (if he thought at all) they were his own: men still. At last he found that they were not: but it didn't seem to matter, every one was going the same way.

There really was, somehow, a Sunday-evening feeling in the air. At home the people would be in church. Even here the war seemed for the moment only a bizarre fringe on the edge of man's common, homely wear of peace. Even here the marching troops were a very narrow foreground; behind, nestling to the mothering earth's kindly breast, lay the villages

It was across a wide flat we moved now; no longer through lanes but along an unfenced road; the mist was not everywhere, but only where, perhaps, the ground was more moist. When there was mist it lay low, like white pools; above it was the clear blackness of the deepening night.

The men all went quicker than the Ancient, who was in truth sauntering, enjoying the seclusion that seemed only insisted upon by the

passing of so many strangers. As they went by they were chattering, not loudly, each to his neighbour. It all seemed wonderfully friendly and peaceful: and beyond the thin line of tramping feet, and beating hearts, lay the dead silence of those vacant fields.

But at last the troops had all gone by, and the Ancient realized that he was alone, and had no business to be. So he moved on more quickly, not sorry to have a whole road to himself, and no dust.

Presently a mounted orderly rode by; but, before he passed, he stopped to ask if B. was over yonder.

"I don't know a bit. I never know what place is ahead till I get there."

"And you never get lost, sir?"

"Not out and out. I'm lost now in one sense. That is to say, my lot are somewhere in front, and I don't exactly know where. But I shall soon overtake them."

"Well; good-night, sir."

And he trotted on into a pool of mist that came up as high as his knees; his body was up in the clear air. He looked like a man drowning in milk.

Quarter of an hour later two soldiers on horseback came in the opposite direction.

"Have you met a Field Ambulance?"

"Yes, sir. Two."

"You didn't know their numbers?"

"One was the 14th."

(The Ancient wanted the 15th.)

"Straight ahead?"

"Yes, sir. Good-night."

Ten minutes later there were cross-roads, and at them, under some trees, was a little wine-shop. Outside were half a dozen soldiers. They declared that the Field Ambulance had gone down the road to the left. It seemed rather rude, after asking, and getting that reply, to kept on straight ahead. But the Ancient had a conviction that it was straight ahead that his own Field Ambulance had gone. So he loitered and lit a cigarette, and presently the men went indoors "to see what time it was." Then he walked on. Soon there was another clump of trees; and a sort of cabaret, that was half palm, under them. In the inky shadow a group of cavalry were sitting, with a stealthy effect, silent on their horses. One of the men came out on the road and said:

"We think we're lost——"

"I have been wondering if *I* was——"

"Oh! you don't belong here?"

"Anything but; I belong to Salisbury Plain."

"Lor'! That's a good step, ain't it, sir?"

And he and the Ancient laughed very cheerfully together.

"I was on Salisbury Plain once," said the trooper, "at Tidworth."

"I hope you liked it?"

"I dare say I shouldn't mind it now. I thought it was the North Pole then."

Twenty minutes after that the Ancient did overtake a Field Ambulance, but not the right one. However, they said that the right one was in front—a good bit in front. It was in the market-square of B.* that he overtook it. The square was full of troops, and the big *place* looked picturesque enough; a large church with a massive tower stood at one side, and there was a fine Town-House, half Gothic, half *Renaissance*. But we were not to stop in B.

"We're to go on to the Lunatic Asylum," one of the men explained. "P'raps Kayzer's there—right place for him, too."

The *Maison des Aliénês* was only just beyond the town, in a really pretty park with splendid wrought-iron gates. The building itself was immense, and of fine design, like a royal château. And there was a large block apart, for the President and staff—itself like another château.

*Not the B, already mentioned.

Our men, however, were billeted in the home-farm and our officers in an out-building where I think faggots were made. Before long the President appeared, and insisted on removing the Ancient, somewhat scandalized, apparently, at the notion of a prelate's sleeping on a bundle of straw (which makes an excellent bed). For six nights the Ancient therefore occupied a huge bedroom in the administrative block, with grand furniture, electric light, and all the other amenities of a civilization that had seemed quite forgotten. The President, Madame, and their three children all gave their guest the kindest welcome: and the Aumônier of the Asylum insisted on serving his Mass every day. There was a large and handsome chapel, and the charge of the *Aliénées* was in the hands of the nuns. There was a most excellent bath-house, and when the Ancient proceeded thither, encumbered with towels, sponge and soap, it was edifying but embarrassing to find the whole Community on their knees outside it, surrounded by such of the lunatics as were not *agitées*.

But nothing could equal the fraternal welcome of the Aumônier, who had his own little house in the *parc*. He displayed the Ancient (who never was exactly spectacular) to his *bonne*, with amazingly daring inaccuracy of description,

seeing that the described was on the spot; and he had the Rector of the Little Seminary over from B. on purpose to feast his eyes on him.

"Him," he boasted, "did I find writing letters on a bundle of faggots in the wood-house, with a heap of straw for *fauteuil*. There is nothing like the humility of the English."

"The English," observed the Ancient meekly, "are famed the world over for their humility."

The Rector of the Little Seminary gave a puff at his pipe, removed it, and said with triumph: "St. Augustine laid it down that the English were *non Angli sed Angeli.*"

"Was it not St. Gregory?—and he had only seen two of us; very young ones."

"He empties," observed the Aumônier, in an awe-struck aside, "his own waste-paper basket."

"Tiens!" cried the Rector, with another puff.

"Also," declared Marie, the old *bonne,* popping her head round the door, "when the fire went low, he put on coals with his fingers, and applied a sheet of *La Croix* in front, to make it blow up. I saw through the chink, and knew not which indiscretion should be the worst, to suffer it, or to interfere."

"You should not have suffered it," the Rector decided, with an air of one to whom the decision of theological questions was child's play.

I trust no one thinks I am laughing at those kindly creatures. They were so simple and so overflowing with goodness and welcome, so eager to make charitable mountains out of funny little mole-hills; their own eyes were so full of goodness and humility that they saw it everywhere; one was a little ashamed, but not in the least disposed to laugh at them.

"Come," said the Rector, to his friend, "you should give him wine, and cognac, and perhaps a little benedictine. Eh?"

"Not at all," cried the Aumônier, delighted with his own deep knowledge of the English, "it is tea. Tea all day long."

Tea was made, and they watched it poured forth and swallowed as one might watch the drinking of a powerful and dubious drug.

"And really you like it? To me it is unpalatable," observed the Rector.

It certainly was unpalatable. One teaspoonful of tea to three pints of hot water makes a queer drink enough.

"He takes," noted the Rector, summing up and registering the fruits of eager observation, "but one cup. There is always exaggeration in report. One small cup. It is not the case that they drink it in immense quantities."

When Marie had retreated with the balance

of the tea, promising to keep it till to-morrow in case Monseigneur should be again thirsty, the Rector edged a little nearer.

"We are brothers," he began. "Therefore there can be no indiscretion—does the English Protestant Government *pay* the Catholic Chaplains?"

"Certainly it does."

The Rector coughed. Though a brother, he dreaded to overstep the frontier of discretion.

"Do you want to know how much?"

That was precisely what he did want—so did the Aumônier. The Ancient told them how much: and they lifted astonished hands.

"More than a bishop!" they cried in unison. It gave them as much pleasure as if the money had been a legacy to themselves. They were so carried away that they successively embraced the Ancient.

"Well, well!" murmured the Aumônier.

"Tiens!" cried the Rector, "what a Government!"

Oh, dear! How entirely I fail to get on. However, I may love to keep in memory that little parlour, and the kindly French-Flemish faces, the echoes of those gentle and brotherly voices, it makes nothing in the telling, and can hardly

be called a War Picture. But there it was—in and out of the war, everywhere, ran these interwoven strands of peace, and love and neighbourly kindness, so that the memory of it can never be of an arras, grim and frightful, hiding all humanity and leaving only warriors stern and angry-eyed; not that the warriors who came my way were angry-eyed or stern; they also were before all things human, and mostly gentle, as fits young and strong men encountering an old and weak man.

One afternoon two of our officers asked the Ancient to go in to B. with them and show them the Cathedral—which was not a Cathedral, only it was big and ancient, and such churches are apt to get brevet rank. The town had a lively air, being the headquarters not only of one of our Divisions, but of an Army Corps, and full of troops and movement. It was there I first saw specimens of the new Army, and a very fine body of young men they were. That, however, was not on the afternoon I am now speaking of, but a month later when we had come back to this neighbourhood after a few weeks beyond the frontier in real Flanders—*i.e.*, the part of Flanders that forms part of Belgium. B. itself is very Flemish, as many of the names over the shops showed, and also the faces of the people.

Flemish is really the vernacular of the peasant class, and French, I think, is only the language they learn in school.

The large church, too, is Flemish in character, and that note of character is specially struck by the immense, ornate, pulpit of carved wood, standing far down the nave and arresting the first attention of every visitor. Any one who remembers the pulpit of Ste. Gulule in Brussels will know the sort of thing: a thing not very appealing to the individual taste of the present writer, but undoubtedly fine, and a splendid effort of a particular craft.

At one end of the church, near the west doors, was a huge and realistic reproduction of the grotto at Lourdes, a little too huge and a little too realistic, perhaps, for the taste of an architectual purist. But it arrested the attention of my two officers, who wanted to know all about it. How well the Ancient will always remember that dun November afternoon in the big, dim church. Kneeling on the steps in front of the grotto, with the two young men at his side, he tried to tell them, at great length, the story of our Lady's apparitions to Bernadette and all that came of them, from that first apparition which was taking place in the far south, by the Cave under the Pyrenees, while he himself was

being born in a fierce snow-storm near the Yorkshire moors.

The young men were not in the least bored, nor scoffing, nor incredulous, but listened as though he who told the wonderful story had himself seen what he described: and afterwards, when it was finished, one of them said:

"It is a wonderful Church yours, Monsignor, and it is no wonder she holds the hearts of her children in her hand."

And, as we came out into the early dusk, they said very gracious things of the privilege it was to visit such a place with one who could tell them all its significance.*

"For my part," M. declared, "I shall always remember this afternoon, and how I heard from you the story of Our Lady of Lourdes."

"And shall I forget your patience?"

* R. I. P.

XI

WEST FLANDERS

At noon on Friday we left B., and we had only arrived there late on Sunday night: yet it seemed as though one had known it, M. l'Aumônier, old Marie, and the Rector of the Seminary half one's life.

About eleven o'clock the Ancient had knocked at the Aumônier's front door, which "gave" upon the tall iron railings fencing in the *parc* from the high road to C., and when Marie opened it there was M. l'Aumônier in the little hall.

"Ah, ha!" he called out, "I knew it was you. I knew your way of knocking—*Vous avez la manière nerveuse.*"

"We are off," said the Ancient, "in an hour or less."

"Going away! Where to? To the war?" And the kind creature's pale grey eyes grew moist at once.

He found the occasion so solemn that he

opened the door of the best parlour, and drew the Ancient in there—but he did not shut the door, for he knew that Marie would wait outside and want to listen. For weeks, even months, together no one ever entered that best parlour, which only existed for the sake of the best furniture, the chairs on which no one ever sat, the table at which no one ever wrote or worked. There hung the Bishop's portrait, with sky-blue flesh-shadows, and a chrome-yellow pectoral cross, with the illuminated address for *pendant* presented to the Aumônier on the occasion of his silver jubilee. At the top of the address peered a rather Masonic-looking eye out of a triangle surrounded by golden rays, and under it a lamb lay fast asleep on a book with markers like five-franc pieces.

"Going!" cried the little Aumônier, and he sniffed undisguisedly. But he took snuff to afford a pretext for the moisture in his eyes, and blew his nose like a fog-horn. Half a century before, when the Ancient was a little boy, he had regarded the power of blowing one's nose with that noise as a supreme sign of adult manhood, and had envied it.

Marie out in the hall sniffed louder.

"Come in then," her master called out, "and Monseigneur will bless us."

In she came, and the two of them knelt down, looking like two elderly babies.

"Now get up," said the Ancient peremptorily to the Aumônier, "and bless *me.*"

"I couldn't do that," protested the Aumônier shyly.

"Oh, yes, you could. Just try."

And Marie was clearly of opinion that he ought to try.

"It's very greedy," said the Ancient, "to take all the blessing and give none."

The little Aumônier gave a little sob, and shook his head, and blest; and old Marie took her apron out of one eye to watch.

"M. l'Aumônier and I," she said, when the blessing was done, "will always be talking of you."

"Oh, yes!" cried he. "But when it is a cold night, and the fog is wet, and I lie in my good bed, warm, warm, then shall I be unhappy thinking of you—you, Monseigneur, lying in a *grenier* on *sticks,* or straw. For my part I do not see that war is for old persons."

"Eh, *mon cher,* isn't it worse for the young, for those young who never come home from it? When the bit of road left *has* to be short it doesn't seem to matter so much through what rough places it may take us. But now I must

go. And you, my dear friends, dig a little hole in your hearts and bury me in it, and lay fresh prayers on it often. Will you?''

'' Daily, daily,'' promised the little Aumônier. Then he fell on his new old friend's neck, and folded him in an ample embrace.

Half an hour later, as we marched past, outside the railings, there on the doorstep stood M. l'Aumônier, waving his snuff-box, and smiling dolorously; and behind him in the open door was old Marie with her apron still at one eye, half-mast as it were. It seemed hard to the Ancient to believe that a week before he had never heard of the existence of either of them.

As the crow flies it is scarcely two miles from B. to the Belgian frontier, and as the crow flies it is not ten to V., where we slept that night: but I think, as *we* went, it was nearly a twenty-mile march.

In the afternoon we passed by R., and just afterwards met a French brigade marching into quarters there. Watching them go by the Ancient stood on the roadside armed with a fat bag full of medals, and the bag sprung a leak, so that a medal or two oozed out and lay on the ground at his feet without his knowing it. A very tired-looking, quite old, French soldier came loping by, hung about with innumerable little

bags and straps and trappings. A real *poilu*, shaggy, hairy, with ashen skin, and black lean hands. Rather a crafty old eye, and a twisted old mouth with one rather crafty-looking old tooth in it.

"Barlasch of the Guard!" thought the Ancient.

Then the old *poilu* stopped, and swooped, and came up with the medals.

"A vous?" he asked, in a husky voice, his eyes blinking.

"A vous, mon brave, si vous en voulez."

"Alors!" And he hauled up one of his many bags and stowed away the medals.

"I also was a child once," he said explanatorily.

"I am not precisely a child," laughed the Ancient.

Barlasch shook his head sharply from right to left, which meant "So one sees."

"Look," said the Ancient, "take this also." And he gave him a small crucifix.

"Eh! Un petit Christ. Joli ça. Hein? Je la garderai." And he polished the cross upon his grimy sleeve.

"I had another once," he said, in his husky voice. "When I was a little one. But I lost Him."

"Votre petit Christ?"

Barlasch nodded.

"Well, you've found Him again. He *was* little once; before they killed Him."

"Tiens!" cried Barlasch, and he held out one of his knotty, black hands and shook the Ancient's. "A tantôt," he said, moving on.

How tired he looked; almost stumbling, as he slouched along! He had come a long way since he also was *un petit*: perhaps too far.

"A little child shall lead us," thought the Ancient, and he asked the Child to go to the old weary soldier's help.

But hundreds, it seemed like thousands, of other soldiers were streaming by: some really marching, in the middle of the road, though easily, and without our stiffness and "correction:" others walking, how and where they chose, along the edges of the broad unfenced road.

One of these had watched the little episode between the old *poilu* and the old priest, and he had sat down as though to rest. When Barlasch had slouched on he got up and came back a little way.

"Is there," he asked the Ancient, "*un petit Christ* for me also?"

He was a lad, of perhaps one and twenty, with laughing eyes, and a wayward, kindly mouth.

It was a vagrant thought enough that made the Ancient, comparing him and Barlasch remember how it was said to Peter, "When thou wast young thou didst gird thine own self and whither thou wouldest thither walkedst thou. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and others shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."

The two soldiers seemed to divide that youth and age between them. The lad was still in the stage of going whither he would; the old man had gone there, and now, dog-weary of it all, others were carrying him whither he would not.

He shambled slowly enough, and was not yet fifty yards away. To ease the burdens he carried he was lifting his arms on either side of him, giving a sort of hoist with them. It was not very fanciful to think that the old man looked like one moving on strapped to a weary cross. So do many of us struggle on—fastened to the cross we have made for ourselves—whither we would not. Let the Child save them.

"Un petit Christ pour moi aussi, Monsieur!" urged the lad with the wilful eyes.

He took the little gift graciously, with smiling deference. Surely Someone Else was looking on the young man and loving him.

"You will keep it?" said the Ancient.

"Près de mon cœur!"

"Dans votre cœur plutôt, mon petit."

The kind, happy eyes understood and the lad promised.

"Oui, Monsieur, dans le cœur—Je garderai cette croix."

But there were now ever so many more, demanding, with outstretched hands, crosses or medals.

There were many hundreds in the bag, and the bag was empty before the men had all gone by.

"Je n'en ai pas à donner â toute l'Armée Française!" the Ancient had protested laughingly, as the bag became light, to one of them.

"Je ne suis pas l'Armêe Française," retorted the owner of the outstretched hand. "Je ne suis qu'un petit soldat, moi."

Many said a pretty word or two. Some were very tired, and said nothng but a thank you. One said "A la bonne Entente!" as though the giving and the taking of the little medal were a sort of wayside sacramental of friendliness between a son of the Church's eldest daughter and a liegeman of Our Lady's Dowry.

They were mostly medals of God's Great Mother, and the Ancient could but trust that they who claimed them might be reminded of her sky-clean mantle and be drawn under its

protection. The *least* effect must be to each of these soldiers, caught up in the great tangle of the great war, that he should remember the more clearly the double Motherhood stooping over him, Hers in Heaven who is its Queen, and hers on earth whom the Virgin Christ calls His bride and spouse.

Well, we had the road clear at last, and moved on, and came at last to V., an ugly, squalid, big village or little town of mean black-mudded streets. The afternoon had turned sour-tempered, and was for raining, but compromised with a dripping fog. We went first into the yard of a big steam flour-mill: and there fires were made, and the men's tea was got ready.

As the red flames flared up, the shabby daylight confessed itself mere darkness, and almost suddenly one noticed that behind the groups of soldiers, who gathered round the first, their faces and khaki all reddened the night was cowering in. The men, tired maybe, seemed to talk less than usual, as they stared into the fires, and held out their hands to the blaze.

"They talk ugly here" one of them observed in low tones to his neighbour. "I suppose it's Belgian what they talk. French sounds a deal nicer."

The other man nodded, but did not pursue the philological inquiry.

After a while our own tea was ready, and we had it in a very floury room, with an empty sack apiece for *fauteuil.* M. l'Aumônier would have been much scandalized. All the same the tea was hot and tasted very good—one did not much like, then, the peculiar sweetness that condensed milk gives: but I had some the other day again, and the taste of it brought back those days, and those who were one's comrades then, and I liked it.

After tea we stood about in the ugly, dirty street; and after an hour or so were told that we were billeted in the Mairie. It was, somehow, like a school-house, and new, and rather clean and bare. There we dined and someone said, looking up at the fearsome prints of King Albert and Queen Elizabeth on the wall, that it was respectable to be in a Kingdom, instead of a Republic, once more.

Next morning we went on to E., arriving there quite early. It looked pretty as we drew near to it, and even the actual village was much nicer than V. To the left, as we came in, in a really park-like *parc,* there was a large placid-looking château that lay dreaming in a sunny haze; the old master was there, they told us at the lodge-

gates, his sons all away at the war—everyone always spoke of the war as if it were somewhere else. Not far from the château was a hamlet of half a dozen houses and a mill, and in *one* quite small house the whole of us, nearly three hundred, were billeted. The Ancient sallied forth, by himself, to explore. The village consisted of two streets, now packed with French artillery and cavalry: the houses were homely looking and not ugly; and there was a large church, and a large convent of nuns. It was a pretty church, and old and pleasant; and the convent, which joined the back of the château, had the air of nestling under its protection.

In the church they were beginning a Requiem, and the dead person was carried in just as the Ancient arrived. A very old nun, they said: but the nuns who acted as chief mourners, walking nearest to the bier, holding tall white lilies in their hands were young girls—novices.

The Office was very well sung, and almost everyone in the large crowded church joined in the plain-chant. There were many soldiers, French and Belgian, and they were all very reverent and devout. Somehow, the *Dies Irae* sung by them, in the midst of the war, added to its thousand meanings a new one, august and awful like the others.

It would have made a marvellous picture: the open bier (there was no catafalque) with its sumptuous but simple pall, the novices nearest to it, the older nuns next, and then the great crowd of soldiers and priests and village-folk, and behind all the arches and sunlit windows of the fine old Flemish church.

It is all gone now. The church is gone, and the village, the convent and presbytery: not a house left, except the château. Out of our hamlet we ourselves were shelled that very night. The old nun got her peaceful burial only just in time.

When the Requiem was over, and the dead nun had been laid in her grave by the convent wall, there was another funeral, a stranger this time: a young French soldier-lad who had been killed near the village the day before. A French priest, not a chaplain, read the Office; himself a young soldier, too, a *rouge-pantalon*—the red trousers are gone now: the war has carried off them and a hundred other prettinesses that have been found useless. For the war is all grim fact, and "pomp and circumstance" is a discarded tradition.

I fancied that the priest, who was a *fantassin*, had been comrade of the lad he was laying back into the bosom of our mother earth; what he

had to do moved him visibly, audibly. His fine, sensitive mouth was hard to control, and the words shook as they came out. "Even though he be dead, yet shall he live. And no man living that believeth in Me shall be dead for ever." And all his mother came into his eyes as he watched the raw coffin disappear under the rattling clods of earth.

The old nun and the young soldier lay quite near to one onother: one so close to her home, the others so far from his; both bound on *the* same journey, with the same patient Guide.

Then the Ancient went and found the parish priest to arrange for Mass on the morrow. His presbytery was quite near the church, in a shady green garden. It is all destroyed now: and it looked so permanent. Generations of priests had lived there, and it was notable and dignified. I suppose the Curés of E. had been personages of some local importance. Out of the windows one saw the grey old church and the homely, gentle-looking convent. There are no windows left, and there are only ruins to be seen from the trampled garden. There is no such place as E. any more. Do we realize that sort of thing here in England?

From the presbytery the Ancient went strolling through the village, and made a friend.

A smith was shoeing a cavalry horse, and a young cuirassier was watching it with his hands in his big pockets. The horse would not stand still, and the smith lost his temper and kicked the beast.

The cuirassier shook his head and moved off.

"You dislike that, too?" said the Ancient.

"Yes. If I stayed there I should say things. And perhaps too much. I think the man has been tried: he has been shoeing horses since dawn: and many of them are *méchants.*"

"You are *mêridional?*"

"Yes. A *cultivateur* from the Pyrenees. We live near to Lourdes. You know about Lourdes?"

So we talked of Lourdes, and Argèles, "the loveliest valley in the world": and he talked of his home; what a queer superstition it is of the English that only they care much for home! If they heard French peasants talk of home! With what a sickness of longing, with what an aching passion of tenderness!

Jean Marie had a mother: his father was dead; had died in the bad winter when many cattle were drowned, and many garnered crops ruined, by the overflow of the Gave. His mother had three sons, all at the war. And she wrote

constantly to all three. That is, her brother who was M. le Curé, wrote the letters for her.

"Tiens! he writes like the Pope, mon oncle," boasted Jean Marie. "And he taught us, Jules, and Gaston and me; we also write well—he taught us to choose the correct expressions. But my mother she would not learn. She said No, she would not wish to do a thing that our father could not do. That would be out of place."

They were all very Catholic. M. le Curé saw to that—and I do not think his task was difficult; not if Jules and Gaston were like Jean Marie. The big stalwart young man had a face on which the devil had written nothing. I should think that anything foul or base would drop down through his heart as stones flung into clear water fall and leave all clean above.

For an hour he and the Ancient talked, and often since have they talked on paper. Once Jean Marie wrote from home. "Being here," said he, "I naturally think of you."

Could any word be kinder? Being at his mother's side it was natural he should think of the old strange father he had found on the roadside in the war.

"I have nine days' *permission*," he wrote, "and of course I have told them all about you. M. le Curé, my uncle, says I must have been

indiscreet. He requests that I offer to you his most respectful *souvenirs*. I hope you have not been thinking me indiscreet."

That was only one of many letters and the latest is not many days odl.

While the Ancient talked to him a Colonel jumped out of a motor-car, and rushed up to him. They had not met since the Colonel was a slim subaltern (at Malta) with a most exquisite voice for singing. He was now long married, with big children—and a presence.

XII

LOVE IN A MIST

When, on Saturday night, November 7, we were shelled out of our quarters in the hamlet outside E. we did not retreat far, but went back, I suppose a kilometre, along the road by which we had come in the morning—the high road from the French frontier, and B.

It was a very flat road, very Flemish, with spongy flat meadows on either side of it, and here and there a small farm. Even by daylight there would have been no view, and we marched along under a dusky glimmer that could hardly be called moonlight, though the moon was not quite in her last quarter. On that day Mercury had made a transit across the sun's disc, but his little trip had not been noted by us, who were more concerned with the behavior of Mars, and left Mercury to his devotee the Crown Prince.

Our new quarters were less cramped than those out of which we had been forced to flee: there was, at all events, more room for the men.

A little back from the high road, which was here a raised causeway between swampish fields, lay a farm, with thatched ramshackle bars, and a small ramshackle dwelling house. The farmer, like the man in the Gospel, seemed disposed to argue that the door was shut (which it certainly was) and his children with him in bed, and that he would prefer not to be troubled. We, however, took up the line of Mrs. Malaprop, that he had nothing to do with preference and aversion: and ultimately he shambled out, with a weak smile and a pale lanthorn. While waiting for him we had had ample time to admire the great feature of his residence—its dung-heaps, or midden. The midden is, so to speak, the park of your Flemish homestead. On it every window depends for its view; there the children play, and there the cattle chew their cud of sweet—or bitter—fancy: there the farmer relaxes himself in hours of leisure, turning it over with pensive appreciation to awake fresh odours: beside it sits his wife, her labour done, and surveys its oozy mounds, which are all the hills she knows.

This one was particularly extensive — and treacherous. Without, probably, any means of subsequently washing oneself or one's garments, it was startling to find how deeply the unwary visitor sank in it.

"Is that your 'ead sticking out?" I heard one of our humourists (a Londoner) call out to a too adventurous comrade. "Put yer tongue out and I'll 'aul yer up."

Well, our host appeared, smiling and sleepy, and he made our two hundred and eighty men honorary members of his barns.

In they trooped, laughing, pushing, crowding, and exchanging pleasantries.

"It's a bit of a shame disturbin' the rat battalion—up to strength, and no error—they was billeted 'ere first," observed our London wit. "'Ere, Ponto; 'ere, Fido," he called out, slapping his thigh and making whistling noises as though opening an acquaintance with strange dogs.

A dry barn, full of dry hay or straw, makes a pleasant bedroom: I hope those barns were dry, but they looked sodden and oozy, as though meant for overflow meetings—from the midden.

The fourteen officers had more aristocratic quarters, a small kitchen that smelt of cows and mice, and a smaller kitchen that smelt of cheese and second-hand clothes. It was so dark that we optimistically resolved to assume that the mud floors were clean.

"They're as clean as you are anyhow, Chutney," I heard our New Zealander boast to our

youngest officer. "I saw you trip on the midden."

"I believe the floor's *made* of midden," retorted Chutney with some acumen; "patted midden, squeezed down, and aired."

Whatever it was made of it was our bedstead. Our bedding was our own, and had perhaps its own secrets. Don't despise us if we were dirty; how clean would *you* be if you never had a bath?

By the time our blankets had all been laid down, as near to each other as might be, there was no floor left. Mine was laid against the door of a cupboard, out of which little mousey noises came once or twice during the night: in the morning they became more articulate.

"Opé, opé," squeaked two very small voices, and four little hands slapped on the panels insistently.

"Opé, opé."

"That's Flemish," explained Chutney, who was becoming a linguist. "I bet it means 'open.'"

It did, and when I had taken up my bed in order to open, out came a couple of wee figures, as small a boy as ever I saw, in the smallest (but not the cleanest) shirt I had ever seen with a pair of breeches some ten inches long, worn like a stole, and a sister (who was younger and would

have been smaller had that been possible) attired in a sort of strait waistcoat and curl-papers.

Over the low mounds, consisting of officers, these two little persons made hastily across country to the kitchen door. No doubt they were shy, but, I think, they thought it rather funny too.

The Ancient did not think it worth while to go to bed again, as he was due to say Mass betimes in the parish church at E. The causeway between the house and the midden was his dressing-room, an inverted milking-pail his dressing-table; the same pail, not inverted, his washing-stand. The water in it looked dismally like that which lay in puddles in the midden, and it had both body and bouquet.

There was a thick wet fog, and even the barns beyond the midden were out of sight; the men's voices came oddly out of nowhere, like jokes out of eternity.

In such a fog, had there been any way to find, it would not have been difficult to lose it. But one only had to turn to the left on reaching the road and keep on. Apart from the fog, there would have been but little light yet; people meeting on that road could have no idea what each other might be like till within a foot or two of each other. Only once, while still quite out

in the country, did the Ancient meet anybody: then it was a party of soldiers—would they prove to be Germans? It seemed likely enough that during the night the village might have been taken by the Germans.

"What should you do, Ancient," his brother-officers sometimes asked him, "if in your wanderings you should wander into a German outpost?"

"I shouldn't have to do anything. *They* would probably do anything that might be required."

It may here be remarked that some of those brother-officers, who have now read these papers, protest that they never did call him "Ancient"—which is quite true. And some ladies, playfellows of his in old Gracechurch days and, so to speak coeval with him, object that it is a very silly title. Very likely, but it was adopted to avoid the use of another which seemed too grand for this place, and to escape from the too frequent recurrence of the first personal pronoun.

The soldiers did not prove to be Germans but French, their blue uniform looking almost black in the fog; they were cold, and silent, a sort of early-morning moroseness clinging about them like the dank mist.

The French still held the village, though most

of the troops that had filled it yesterday were gone. So far as one could see in the fog, no harm had been done yet. The only lives lost during the night had been those of fifteen horses, in a field behind the church, killed by the bursting of a "Black Maria." Even now the place is held by us, though it is no longer a village—as has been said: houses, church, convent, all obliterated, only the château, out in its park, still standing.

When the Ancient got back to the Flemish farm after Mass he found the men lined up in the road ready to march, which they did in a few minutes. The fog had now grown thinner, which gave it the effect of having drawn back, so that the near fields were visible but those beyond still conjectural, hidden in what was now a white mist.

That was for some hours a day of marching and countermarching. We went always along flat roads between flat fields, passing through several hamlets and shabby villages: everywhere there were French troops, nowhere did we fall in with any English. As the days strengthened the sun came out and the last rags of mist were torn from even the distant trees. The trees were seldom of much account and always grew along the hedges of the square monotonous fields:

wherever there were any their slight cover was sedulously used by the bivouacking French soldiers.

As we went through one hamlet it seemed as if the soldiers watched us pushing on for the open country beyond with an air half amused, half puzzled. However, we kept on our way for another twenty minutes then a halt was called, and the whole unit had to turn and go back. We were quite close to the line of German trenches. We all seemed amused and the men chaffed.

"Pity we didn't carry on a bit, we might have had German sausages for dinner," I heard them declaring.

About one o'clock we had a more British dinner in a flat, sticky, ploughed field. Afterwards two officers asked me if I would go on with them in search of billets, and off we went. After some wandering through lanes we got back to the high road between E. and R., reaching it at a point where there was a small wayside-shrine. Hard by, four wooden crosses, with the names painted on them, marked the last resting-place of four British soldiers whose life's march had ended there: they had been killed, I think, on the 24th of October.

Opposite was the entrance-road of a biggish farm, but some men in a waggon told us it was

already occupied by troops of another division. We had the same luck, or ill-luck, at half a dozen other places we tried. Finally we reached a hamlet called O., at cross-roads, and tried another house that looked hopelessly too small: but that also was pre-engaged. Then we went on a few hundred yards and came to a very poor *estaminet* on the road side, a brick cottage with slated roof, one story high, but long. There the Ancient was left in case the unit might come by, and the other two officers went to try two little farms visible across the fields.

It was rather dull waiting, and he had to wait a long while. Now and then a Flemish yokel would saunter disjointedly up, peer away across the flat and ugly country, and sigh himself into the *estaminet.* The afternoon grew chilly, and as the sun set there were strange clouds high up in the faint topaz-tinted, sky, clouds like red palm-branches crossed trophy-wise. The lonely Ancient watching them prayed they might be omens of victory and peace. Well, there is always peace and victory up where they were, in the aloof heavens; palms stand for martyrdom, too, and it was a martyr-country, that Belgium on whose outraged soil he stood.

"It is a nipping and an eager air" thought

the Ancient. There was no wind, but now and then a chill breathing, as out of a cold mouth. The red palms faded and the sky changed her topaz robe for shabbier night-gear. Quoting Hamlet made the Ancient's ever vagrant fancy turn to another Mad Prince. Was he also, perhaps, looking up at the sad heavens? Had they any reproach for him, any menace? Could he ever bear to be alone in such a silence as might make audible the voices of indignant shades? He who had cried "Havoc!" and let loose the dogs of war, had he any horror of himself? Up and down, to keep himself warm, the Ancient paced the muddy road outside that shabby wine-shop. The folk inside could not be very merry in their cups: there came no sound of laughter, hardly any of voices.

Presently a girl came to the door: would Monsieur come in and have a cup of coffee?

"Ah, you talk French?"

"Yes, Monsieur; I am not Fleming, I am Walloon. *Resfugiée.* We are almost all *refugiées* in there."

She was not of course, the mistress of the place. Neither master or mistress spoke French, though France was so near.

Inside it was almost completely dark. There were perhaps twenty people there. A dozen

refugees, whose homes had ceased to exist; and the rest the host, and hostess, and their few and sombre customers. There was hardly any talking. They had the war in their hearts, and gossip was strangled by it. I do not think that, after all, any one was drinking. An old woman sat near the dull stove, a little child at her knees, whose small fat palms she kept softly slapping with her own bony and lean old hands.

"My grandmother and my brother," explained the girl who had called the Ancient in, seeing his eyes turned towards them.

He went up and spoke to the old homeless creature.

"Yes, Monsieur," she answered, "all our folk are on the Cross. Let the Crucified turn to them."

"And we to Him. Of *Him* there is no doubt."

We did not talk long or much. Shall a stranger intermeddle with our grief?

There was a fine air of reverence towards her age and anguish among all the rest. The girl told the Ancient very simply that it must be much worse for the very old.

"My grandmother never went out," she said, "she sat at home. She never made journeys in her life. And how can *she* hope to see the end of the war? If *we* go back some day, how can

she hope to be with us? For us young ones it is different. Even the war can't last always."

"May God send you happy days, my poor child."

"We must take such days as He sends. I am *fiancée*. But *he* is killed—was killed in the very beginning, at Namur."

When the Ancient came out into the dusk again, to continue his marching up and down, there was plenty to think of. Oh, God, how long! Eh, how many more must there be now, fresh-slain, to cry from under the altar before the white throne—"How long, O Lord, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood?"

And in the soft sad sighing of the night-breath came the answer: "Rest a little season till your fellow-servants also, and your brothers, that shall be killed as you, till their number be fulfilled."

Surely these are they who come out of great tribulation, and even them also prayer can follow with its wistful arms of reverent pity.

The thought of the ruined homes so sharply brought there home to him, in that meagre and poor place, must needs send the Ancient's heart yearning to his own. How could he help thinking of it, and of the face he loved best looking out of a window to see him go—on that drizzling

August afternoon that seemed so endlessly long ago? How terrible had been the patience of that noble face, how awful the obedience of its smile, that had to come because the great heart so near breaking, insisted.

Only a few days before that parting had he knelt at her knees, as over half a century before he had knelt there to hear for the first time of the Anguish and Murder of God.

"I have to tell you something that you will not like."

"You are going to the war. We must each do our part." His to go; hers to suffer. And her old, old white hand was laid upon his old white head.

That the war should strike *men;* well, so long as wars must be: but that it should strike women, and so much more cruelly! For it is crueller to sit at home, wondering, wondering, fearing, hungry in ignorance for news that may be so awful when they come, that is much more cruel than to go, out among strange scenes and people, with insistent duties to fill the hours; eh! what will be the women's testimony against the man who, in the restless chambers of his irresponsible mind, forged the war on the ruthless anvil of his heartless heart?

It was very long before the other two officers

came back. They had at last found two farms close together, both miserable enough, but the barns of both together would just hold our men, and in one were a couple of small rooms that *must* hold us. We went there, and there for about five years (a fortnight nominally) we stayed almost idle, for it was our turn to stand back—and feel as though we were forgotten, stranded in some oozy back-water of the war.

The woman of the farm where we officers had our wretched quarters had the noisiest, most piercing voice ever heard out of a nightmare. She was youngish and strong, and all her strength had its citadel in her big, loose-lipped mouth. She also possessed the gift of ubiquity. Her screaming voice was everywhere at once. To her husband, I think, it was a singular holiday that her scoldings should be divided among so many strangers instead of falling, like stinging thongs of raw hide, on his helpless slouching back. She was, most likely, a worthy creature and resolved to be a good wife; to yell her husband into prosperity, and scream her little girls into affluence and ultimate good marriages. The only things she had no time for was to be ever in the least pleasant; in war-time luxuries are out of place, and that luxury was the first she

discarded. In times of peace, charity bade one surmise, she might be an engaging person. It is impossible to convey the slushy dirtiness of that place. The grand approach (and only one) was *through* the midden. Our two tiny rooms opened on it, and every time any one of us came in—there were fourteen of us without counting our servants—we brought some of it in with us. And the fields beyond were quagmires of sticky mud, for the snow came now, and rotted them. At night there were hard frosts, but the sun came in the day and melted snow and frost and rotted the deep soft Flemish earth. It was bitterly cold and we were fireless, and the only chance of air and ventilation lay in keeping the windows wide open so that the snow came driving in, and the ruthless north-east wind. The room we all sat in was twelve feet by ten, and fourteen people (with their belongings) do crowd a room of that size. Once we were all in, it was terribly inconvenient for the others when anyone wanted to go out. Before the beds could be laid out on the filthy floor the table had to be taken to bits and got rid of.

The Ancient confesses, meekly, that the appalling cold was more terrible to him than the dirt: his feet were always what is called dead, and

they were never dry. Every night he went out in the dark to wash them in snow, sitting, as needs must, in the snow to do it. It might keep them clean, but it certainly did not make them warm.

The German lines were pretty near, and the noise of the great guns never ceased, but was always most at nights. Of course our farm was far within range had the enemy chosen, as any moment they might choose, to pick it out. Sometimes one could tell by the noise that a Black Maria had burst in one of the fields close to us.

Midden Hall, as we called it, was certainly an unpleasant mansion: its barns small, rotten, and filthy and itself unspeakable. But it must not be supposed that it had no pleasures.

There were our own men to look after, and there was time enough to go farther afield. All round us were French troops, and the hamlet at O. (our own hamlet) was crowded with them, so was the big village of R. a mile or so away. There were Belgian troops too, but these were resting, *i. e.*, mending the road between us and R. Hardly any of them spoke French: I suppose they belonged to Flemish battalions. Utterly devoid of Flemish the Ancient was determined

to open relations with them all the same: and it was done by means of medals, scapulars, and little Crucifixes, on an afternoon of driving snow, biting wind, and deep, deep mud. What had been the road was a mud-river, from eighteen inches to two feet deep. On the following afternoon the Ancient went again to R., accompanied this time by the "Surgeon in Khaki," our New Zealander, and another young officer whom one may call Stern, not because he was, but because his real name was rather like it.

As soon as we appeared on the stretch of road where the Belgian soldiers were working they crowded up, those not yet medalled extremely eager to be supplied. If they could not talk English or French they could smile, and perhaps a conversation consisting of smiles goes as far towards friendship as a wordier one and scowls therewith.

Unfortunately they had decided that the Ancient was a bishop: and that much Flemish even we could understand. The Ancient's frowns of disclaimer apparently only convinced them that he was a bishop of irascible temper.

"You'd better let it alone," declared the New Zealander, "or they'll think you're something

worse. Till you can talk Dutch you're a bishop, and they like it."

Whether the advice was conscientious or the reverse, one had to take it: that it was not conscientious seemed the more probable from the fact that the New Zealander proceeded to encourage the possibly drooping spirits of these warriors by a graphic description (in dumb show) of a decisive victory gained by our side, of which no official notification had been seen by Stern or me.

"It all does good," our New Zealander explained as we walked on. "I'm all for medals. They're a grand thing for the Entente."

At R. I had already some old friends (of twenty-four hours' standing), who signalled the arrival of the "English Colonel-Priest." At first we went into the church, which was large, and pseudo-Gothic, *i.e.,* Gothic with strong Renaissance leanings in matters of detail. It was now a bivouac, and stands of arms stood here and there in the clean straw with which the pavement was strewn, and groups of soldiers lay asleep under the monuments of those who had fallen asleep long ago. Other groups chatted, or walked about. After a word or two with some of these (they were all French) they hinted

that yesterday their comrades had been given medals and scapulars. So with his back against a confessional the Ancient, with the New Zealander and Stern for deacon and subdeacon, began his distribution. It lasted over half an hour, and many hundreds of the poor lads were made happy. At that time French chaplains were not, by regulation, allowed to give medals or pious objects to their men, though the prohibition was, I fancy, never much insisted on after the war began, and soon fell into oblivion.

What they all wanted most was "un petit Christ," but the Ancient had not Crucifixes enough for so many men. Most had to content themselves with medals and scapulars: I must say all were grateful for what they did get. But there were three whole battalions in the village, and they crowded into the church so hopelessly that we had to come out into the street and finish our distribution there. The scene in the church would have made a fine painting had some old Flemish artist come out of his tomb to fix it on his canvas. The westering wintry sun poured in through the high plain glass windows, lighting up arches and pillars; the choir and altars were in an aloof shadow: and so was all

one wall: in a colder twilight was the straw-strewn floor, broken by stacked arms and huddled groups of sleeping soldiers: round the confessional was the crowd of eager, but respectful men of war, torn so lately from quiet farms, or gentle arts of peace, pressing forward to receive each his sacred emblem of the great Prince of Peace, the Counsellor, the Wonderful, or of his sweet Maid-Mother.

"I must say I do like it," quoth our New Zealander, when all our treasures spent, we turned home. "I hope Ancient [*sic*] you'll always let me come with you when you're going to do it."

"Ah, but I don't generally know. It crops up. I knew to-day, but as a rule I don't know beforehand."

Chutney was jealous when he heard.

"You never asked *me* to come, Ancient," he complained.

[*He* certainly never said Ancient, though he had most right being youngest of us all, a mere boy, full of a boy's quips and laughter. And he never, never will grow old. The Young Man from Nazareth has looked on him, and loved him, and taken him where there is no age, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing.]

"*You*, Chutney! You know very well you were gun-running for Carson in the Black North till the war came. Would giving popish gear to papists be in that line?"

"Ah, dear Ancient! I'm learning things. Don't."

And the Ancient, who greatly loved the lad, was ashamed.

XIII

SILENCE

Winter, as has been already hinted, came while we had our quarters at Midden Hall, West Flanders. And when it came, it came with a murderous thrust, like the horribly expert lunge of a long cold sword, out of the east, finding out our vitals. A wind born in Siberia, breeched amid the primeval desolation and bleakness of Russian steppes, and attaining its swift majority on the great, grim glowering Central Plain of Europe (enemy territory) brought it to us, and seemed disposed there to leave it.

While the wind was driest, most parching, hardest, it was coldest, with the unsparing awful chill that seems to get its fangs into the heart itself, and freeze the very blood-springs. The frost it brought was at first black and invisible—when you can *see* the frost, white on the stubble and spangled wayside weed, it is never so pitiless. It was only *felt,* in shaking limb, tense brow, crackling skin, curdled blood, cracked lip;

it washed, up and down the whole body, like an icy refluent wave getting in between flesh and bone, and further in yet between body and soul. To turn the naked face to the wind was to offer it to the lash of a cruel whip.

Then the snow came; and the wind, rollicking over a thousand miles of snow, was not warmed by it.

One thought "Crimean winter! Does war breed hard winters as it breeds other hard things?"

But with the snow it grew a little lighter. The black airs of those first days of the murderous frost softened to dingy grey: the inhuman iron of the low skies yielded to softer, lower clouds of lead. At midday there might be a little sun, at afternoon was a frosty mist, pallid

"Like a face-cloth to the face"

clinging to the snow-bound flats. Even at night the fog held but low down, clutched to the world's cold bosom. Above, it was clear, and black and lonelier. Trees waded in the white mist, knee-high but their branches swung free in the wind, and, high up, their naked black fingers snatched at a star or two, even at a frightened moon running between rags of cloud.

On one of the last afternoons at Midden Hall

Stern and the Ancient sallied forth to walk. They turned towards Ypres, only fallen into the beginning of its long agony then. The fields tilted a little, upwards towards a belt of wood, and it was pretty, in a wan fashion—like a woodcut of Bewick's. Beyond the little wood the way dipped again to cross-roads, where a dozen cottages huddled round a small inn. At that spot soon afterwards many men were killed; the enemy found it out and shells fell there whenever our people went that way.

A pale gleam of sunlight came running eastward, like a hopeless bulletin from the short day's death-bed: it made the snow whiter, and the group of mean dwellings in front more sullenly black.

"It is like a Christmas card," says the Ancient.

"Yes. The noise of the guns doesn't show in the picture," Stern comments shrewdly.

At the cross-roads we looked right, left, and in front. The leftwards road led to Dickebusch.

"Where does *that* road go?" we asked, pointing in front, of a French soldier who stood, flapping himself with his arms to get warm, at the corner.

"To death, I should say," he replied cheer-

fully, without pausing in his flapping. "To shell-fire and the result."

"He thinks the English are all mad, it would be a pity to disappoint him," declared the Ancient.

And we kept ahead, leaving the little huddle of dull, brooding-looking houses, behind us. There was another tilt upward of the stark and frozen fields: it was scarce a hill, the low ridge to which the road led. Still it was hill enough to bound the view that way. To the right the fields ended in a gaunt spinney; a dozen cows were standing about, red, I suppose, but black to the eye against the snow. Presently we overtook a man, armed with a large, ill-folded umbrella. He ranged alongside and walked quicker as though he had purposely loitered for us to get abreast and was disposed for conversation. He asked a great many questions —and seemed in high spirits. (The Allies' affairs were not supposed to be roseate just then.)

"Tell him lies," suggested Stern calmly.

"Fairy-tales are not lies," said the Ancient, bethinking himself of such fairy-tales as Pip told Pumblechook and Mrs. Joseph Gargery when cross-questioned after his first interview with Miss Havisham.

The gentleman with the umbrella seemed worried by the fairy-tales and nettled by them.

At the top of the little lift in the road we could see straight ahead, across downward tilted fields, to a very near horizon scarfed in woodland. Here we stood still and watched. The fringe of woodland was scarcely two kilométres from us.

"Ah," says our inquisitive friend, "so you think it's all going very well?"

"Splendidly," quoth Stern.

"Then there'll be good news soon," and the owner of the umbrella chuckled, and grinned, and sidled off across the snow to our right, where some more cows were standing motionless in the frozen stubble.

It appeared necessary for him now to wield the umbrella; he half opened it, shut it again, waved it, half opened it again, but without going very near the cows, who appeared quite unmoved by his gesticulations. If he meant to drive them he seemed singularly contented with very slight results—since the results were *nil*.

On the white fields his figure would be visible, even to the naked eye, from further off than the woods over yonder: so would our own figures be. But through field-glasses his gesticulations might seem less village-idiot-like.

"That," observed Stern with conviction, "is a scoundrel."

At that moment a shell fell, and burst in the snow, not fifty métres to the left of where we stood. Almost immediately another came, a Black Maria, and burst a little nearer, still on the left; and still the umbrella was busily engaged.

"'Bout turn.' Eh?" said Stern, and we started homeward not very talkative. Other shells came, but fell wider; and, in spite of the umbrella, the Ancient felt safer when the little ridge was between those woodlands and himself and his friend.

"I suppose," he said, after a long silence, and not cheerfully, "that really was a spy."

"If he isn't, then I'm one," answered Stern coolly, as he stood still to fill and light his pipe.

Somehow it was depressing.

That was our last afternoon at Midden Hall. Next morning we had orders to be gone. I cannot say that our screaming hostess seemed much perturbed at our departure.

Through O. we went; then along a flat road with trees on one side; behind R.; then up a slowly rising road to the ridge that there divides Belgium from France. A very gallant, gaunt

body of men at one point came riding down on lean horses, and we had to lie to, thrust into the hedge, to let them pass. Some, of the officers even, had no boots, but had their feet swathed up in putties. Many of the men were quite tattered: all had a singular, shining air of gallantry and high heart. Alas, many horses were riderless; he who rides on the Pale Horse having set their masters on the crupper of his own saddle and ridden off with them to the City of Great Peace. Every uniform was war-stained: mud-stained, rain-stained, snow-stained, battle-stained: and the dingier the uniform the more gallant and noble seemed the wearer.

"Who are you?" asked the Ancient, clinging to the slippery top of a high bank.

"Royal Horse Guards Blue," cried the trooper, laughing out of his clear blue English eyes into the Ancient's. As plainly as if he had time to say it, adding, "Ever seen us in London; my little shabby gentleman?"

London would never have made that cavalcade the poignant, splendid picture it was. A little step, sirs, but an infinite, from the swell soldier of London streets to the shabby hero there.

Beyond the dip of the hill was a tiny village—full of wintry sunshine, and biting wind that

flapped the shutters of a cabaret. The Royal Horse Guards Blue were there too, still riding through. A very young officer, but very big, had got off his horse, and was unwinding a blood-sopped bandage off his foot. A girl came out of a cottage with clean strips of linen, soft and old; she was for kneeling to bind the hurt foot. But the lad blushed, and would not suffer that: he took the rags and thanked her, with a very gracious and sweet smile, but would do it himself.

"Ladies," said he, using the word he meant, "do not kneel to us others, men. But thank you, thank you, very much indeed."

"Of nothing, Monsieur."

The Ancient held his horse while he wound his bandage, and the horse nibbled, with lip only, at the Ancient's ear. A very old man and a very young boy came and watched.

When the tall lad of an officer had finished, mounted, saluted the girl, and ridden on, with his bandaged, unbooted foot in the stirrup, the old man asked in piping treble, pointing after him and his troopers:

"De quel régiment, Monsieur?"

"D'un régiment des Gardes-à-Cheval de notre roi, Monsieur."

"Quels braves!" cried the old man. Neither

he nor the girl, nor the little fellow, laughed or smiled. It did not seem to strike them that a King's guard might be more resplendent in tailor's stuff.

"But you are French?" queried the Ancient.

[We were in Belgium still.]

"French, Monsieur. From near Arras. *Refugiés.*"

Thus it was always. Belgian refugees in France, French in Belgium: the bitter wave of exile surfing over the frontier like a sad tide over an invisible bar.

The last of the cavaliers disappeared round the twist of road leading up out of the village, and presently our own men came down. After that shallow dip the way swerved up again to the higher ridge on the top of which Belgium and France met.

The Ancient walked on alone, eager to be in France again. The ridge had a saddle-back, and in the very seat of the saddle sat a hamlet—a small, clean, cabaret, and less than a half-score cottages. Hungry and thirsty, the Ancient went into the cabaret and asked for coffee and bread. A comfortable middle-aged woman gave them to him, and her small people came to the door of the house-place to watch. Over their heads the Ancient could see their grandmother, knitting

and saying a rosary at the same time. Above the shelves, ranged with bottles, in the outer room, hung the crucifix: you see it everywhere in the cabarets hereabouts.

"Pray for mine," the Ancient asked the grandmother, giving a little red badge of God's Heart to each of the children.

"Eh, oui. Monsieur perhaps has left a sister at home?—never mind, she prays for him."

"I never had a sister. It is my mother who prays."

"The mother of Monsieur must be old—as I am."

[Her daughter was much younger than the Ancient.]

"A great deal older, I think."

Then they all fell to talking, the children too, and were very kind and friendly. Some men came in, and the guest was displayed to them with much complacence, as if he had been a rare old specimen, taken alive, and borrowed from a museum.

The coffee was being made hot over the stove, and the Ancient said:

"I am going out. I want to run into France. I shall come back immediately."

It was about thirty yards into France. There

was a white post on the road-side with "France" on a flap on one side of it, and "Belgique" on a flap on the other.

Two of our officers had come up and the Ancient said to them:

"Come and be in France."

And they all three went there. Three or four French soldiers were watching, and they slightly plumed themselves when they saw Major O. bring out a Kodak. There was also a Belgian soldier, who affected to be unaware of the camera, and looked what time it was by his wrist-watch three times in two minutes.

"Come and be the Entente Cordiale," suggested the Ancient, "M. le Commandant is going to make a photograph."

They all came, the Belgian warrior assenting with a glance of surprise towards the camera that might have deceived the very elect. But he had cuffs, and adjusted them.

He ranged himself to the Ancient's right—in his own country: the Frenchmen went to the Ancient's left—in theirs. Half the Ancient was in the Kingdom, half in the Republic.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," observed the Belgian, absent-mindedly, with a watchful eye on the camera, "donne le côté gauche à la France."

"Oui, Monsieur, j'ai en France le flanc gauche —où se trouve le cœur."

"Nous vous remerçions, Monsieur!" cried one of the Frenchmen: but the Belgian was arranging the set of his mouth, and made no repartee.

When the Ancient went back for his coffee, Madame said:

"We have put away the little badges Monsieur gave our *petits*. When the bishop comes next time they shall wear them."

The New Zealander was one of the two officers—who had also come in; and he proceeded to explain the Ancient in more striking colours.

"Writes books!" cried Madame.

"Tiens!" cried Madame's mother.

"What puts Monseigneur in the books?" demanded the eldest little girl.

"All sorts of things. You, perhaps," said the New Zealander, pinching the child's ear—as if he had been Napoleon.

"Monsieur aime bien les enfants," quoth the watching mother smilingly.

Presently we all went on, down a long hill into France: and half-way down it a breathless little girl came running, her pigtail sticking out behind like the handle of a *casserole*.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!" she called out, and the Ancient ranged up.

"Maman!" she gasped. "Petit souvenirs. Pour Monsieur. Monseigneur . . ." and she proffered a yellow envelope containing post-cards of the hamlet in the saddle-back, ". . . de la part de maman. . . ."

So we were in France again: and the westering sun was getting ready to seek his early (ill-earned) rest behind a French horizon.

The Ancient looked to right and left lovingly.

"Like coming home," he thought.

The landscape was really prettier—there *was* a landscape anyway—and it lay in a tenderer yellow-white mist, and every roof scattered through the quiet fields sheltered a French hearth, though God only knew how many gaps there were at every one of those hearths.

But the sun set, and the day died, and the dusk fell, and our eastern enemy the wind came looking for us, and found us, even there. Not a French wind: Pomeranian I should say, it was so snappish and waspish. In its teeth it held sharp, microscopic ice-needles, like files grown tiny from industrious in-breeding. Whew! it was cold. That sort of wind makes no noise: it comes not to brag, but to bite: not to say "I'll

freeze the marrow in your bones," but to do it. A wind that comes from kissing the savage northern plains of Germany is (like Habbakuk) capable of anything.

The Ancient's bones felt like the backbone of a scarecrow in a frozen field as he and his unit marched into St. J., a long draughty village, with a long uncompromising church without anything (chapel, transept, buttress) to break its red-brick length.

Our first billet was in the school, and there we sat down to supper at the children's desks. When your supper is chiefly soup, a desk of somewhat acute angle makes a queer dinner-table and your lap is likely to get as much as your mouth.

But in the village was a Convent, and in the Convent were nuns, and the birds of the air carried the matter. Prelates are rarer birds in northern France and in all Flanders than that other bird that carries matters. The nuns were gravely scandalized to hear talk of prelates lapping up soup out of preciptious soup-plates in school class-rooms; and a deputation came to see.

"Ma Sœur" saw and was more deeply shocked than ever.

"This," said she, as though quelling a revolution, "must cease."

"I cannot possibly go to the Convent alone," protested the victim of the revolution, "all the officers must be together."

"You all come," quoth Ma Sœur. And we all went.

The Convent was called the Maison St. Joseph and proved to be very big—nearly a tenth of the size of the smallest nun's heart. All of us were ordered there, soldiers and all. As for the officers we were given a large airy parlour for living-room, where we could move about, write letters conveniently, and eat our meals in extreme comfort. Chutney fairly blushed when a white table-cloth was laid by a nun in a white *cornette,* and awe settled on us all when the nun (herself unmoved) brought a dinner-napkin for each officer. Leo XIII. and Pius X. looked down upon us from the walls with blandest tolerance.

"Ma Sœur," observed the nun with the napkins, "hopes the officers will smoke when they wish."

"Ask her," murmured Chutney in the Ancient's ear, "if we may play bridge."

The Commanding Officer frowned, and was beginning a chill rebuke of Chutney's presump-

tion, but the little nun instantly declared that there could be no possible objection.

Presently Ma Sœur looked in to endorse these permissions and see if we were comfortable.

"Only," said she, "I should be grateful if the officers would go up to their rooms at nine o'clock."

"Gentlemen," said the C.O., "you will leave this room every night at 8.45."

"No, sir," quoth the spoiled Ancient, "Ma Sœur says 8.60."

Afterwards the C.O. gave a little exhortation. [At the beginning of the campaign his nose had had an habitual tilt, eloquent of criticism, whenever there was allusion to the Catholic Church.] "Remember, gentlemen," said he, "that, by the great kindness and courtesy of these holy ladies, you are their guests. A lot of officers are odd enough guests for such a house: and think how easily we may put them out more than our presence itself must put them out. Take care that in everything you remember where you are, and in what sort of house."

I am sure it was a very kindly and respectfully meant little exhortation: and equally sure that none of those who carefully and respectfully listened to it had the least need of any such reminder. Everywhere in France I heard the

same word used of the English troops and their officers by the French clergy and the French nuns, "Ces *bons* Anglais."

"Sir," declared the Ancient to his C.O. afterwards, "I am sure there is not a nun in France who would not welcome the English who are come to stand beside their own soldiers in this war."

And as the days went on it was easy to see that the Sisters of Charity at St. J. were not less contented with their military guests than their guests were with their open-hearted welcome.

We were given excellent beds, and some of us bedrooms to ourselves. The Ancient had two beds in his room, and after not having seen one for so long it seemed a wasted opportunity not to be able to occupy both. The hospitality of the nuns provided even a night-cap—so ample that it must have been knitted for a bishop. In the room there was also a stove, and, in spite of his earnest protests that he did not want it lighted, the Ancient, on going up to bed, found it literally red-hot all over. Shutters, blinds and curtains were all drawn close, and the Ancient hurriedly prayed to the Three Holy Children for guidance in his emergency. For the first time since it had begun to blow he began to think of

coming to terms with the ill-conditioned wind outside.

Even the Ancient's servant had been thought of. He came tapping at the door now.

"Sir," said he, wide-eyed, "the nuns have had a bed made up for me, *in* a bedstead, *in* a room: all to myself. Had I better sleep in it?"

"Why not?"

"Well. It seems such *neck*. And it might breed jealousness, if the fellows knew. Only, of course, it's just along of me being your servant."

"Well, go to bed, and don't tell the other fellows."

From St. J., we could walk to B., and did so, where the Ancient paid a surprise visit to the Maison des Aliénés and the little Aumônier. He opened the door himself, with a finger in his breviary, but he instantly called loudly for Marie, who came running from the kitchen, armed with a *casserole*, fully convinced that the Germans had come back. Finding how matters stood, she looked so much disposed to pat the Ancient's back with her *casserole* that he could only hope it was cool and empty.

On another afternoon we walked to the Mont des Cats, a place some four or five miles from St. J. A very windy ridge, visible far and wide,

was the Mont des Cats, and somehow the look of it made the Ancient think of Wuthering Heights.

"Do take us there," some of our officers begged of the Ancient, "on the top of the hill there's a huge monastery. And a German Prince—of Hesse-Something—was killed there ten days ago: there was fighting all round the place. The monks buried him. But fourteen Germans came in the night, a few days afterwards, and dug him up and stole him. Do take us to see the monastery."

Stern, the New Zealander, and Chutney, with the Ancient, made up the party. It was a pleasant walk, wintry, but through rather pretty ever-rising frozen fields. On the way Chutney came to the Ancient's side and said:

"Tell us what it means—would you mind?—being a Cistercian."

Nature and youth and high spirits were for ever insisting on the lad's being perky: he was all quips and laughter. But something else—a very sweet and clear heart—made him gentle, and oddly meek at times. And he had the rather rare grace of being singularly ready to respect what he did not yet understand.

"You see," he said, "I don't know anything about monks. Perhaps the others do."

"Do you?"

"Not I," said Stern and our New Zealander.

"Well, it isn't very easy to explain, in a few words, to three fellows like you, what Cistercians are; what monks are for. There are even some of our own people, nowadays, who are so shallow, and so unfortunately influenced by the air they breathe in such a place, say, as London, who do not appreciate monks, and wonder if they are not out of date. If God is out of date (as the air those men, of whom I speak, breathe, thinks He is) then monks are out of date too. Their reasonableness depends on His existence, and the reality of His claims. They are just for God. They do not fly to philanthropy to excuse themselves. First of all I must explain that our Church has always vehemently defended the thing we call Vocation—that every man, among his other liberties, has the inborn right to follow his own special and particular vocation. Most men sooner or later have the vocation (among other things) to marry, and so help to carry on the world. But we deny that every man on earth has that particular vocation. A million have it, there is one man in the next million who has not:—In the beginning of the Church there were men who felt themselves so out of tune with what we call the world, the social bustle of life around them, that they went out from it,

carrying nothing of it with them, into the wilderness—as the Baptist had done, and many of the holy Hebrew race before him. They lived anywhere, in holes of the rocks in shallow penthouse lairs with the jutting, scooped out, Nile-bank for roof. They scratched up the earth around their caves or wattled huts, and grew such coarse pulse as would come, for their food. And always, all day long, and half night long too (often for whole nights), they gave themselves up to tryst with Him from whom we fly. Did you ever hear this?—

> "'I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
> I fled Him down the arches of the years;
> I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
> Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
> I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
> Up vistaed hopes I sped;
> And shot precipated
> Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
> From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
> * * * * *
> For though I knew His love who followed
> Yet was I sore adread
> Lest, having Him, I must have nought beside.'

"Most of us have always that dread (and guard against it) of being like Peter, James and John who, seeing Him revealed on the mountain, came down seeing nothing else *nisi solum Jesum:* the terror lest, once giving God the inch we could spare, He should take the whole ell of us.

We think Infinity is bleak, even that of Infinite Love. So huge that it must burst our heart if we let it in: and we turn to little things as being near and neighbourly. And perhaps some of us like to be just a little above our company (not so high above as to be beyond appreciation) and it damps us to think of an intimacy wherein every glance at our Friend would threaten contrast, and reproach of our inferiority. The solitaries of whom I speak fled *to* that from which we fly. Their object was to be overtaken by Him the sound of whose following frightens *us*. They hungrily went to learn that which we are in hourly fear of knowing—God and His claims. You and I—how little can we know each other, though we have each other's faces to see, voices to hear, gestures to note, acts to witness? Can one know God, whose Face you and I never saw, whose words never fell in our ears, whose gesture is the vast creation, and His action the ordered obedience of the universe? To that knowledge they set themselves. He was their school, their schoolmaster, and their lesson. Him only—that was their subject: they were not ashamed to be men of one book, seeing that in its ages was everything. They gave themselves to what we call contemplation as a life-work. Not a new-fangled notion in Christianity, nor

even a discovery of Christianity, for the great, ancient religions of the east all have it, and had it long before Christianity was born in Jewry. The greatest sage in the east has always been, and still is, he who holds it no waste to go out into the loneliness where the infinite voice can be heard, and let his life's achievement be nothing more than an eavesdropping at Divine Wisdom.

"Well, among the solitaries there would often be a man of special character, of peculiar quality, and him the others would take for leader. Under his presidency, or abbacy, the scattered group would be unified into a community. The solitary was still to be found, remaining simply a hermit. The united solitaries were monks. And as all union presently implies law, though ever so voluntarily accepted, each community came to have some sort of rule—if at first it came to no more than the recognition of special hours for special duties and services. As the ages slowly passed, the monastic idea grew, and certain great exponents and masters of it arose, the greatest St. Benedict, who fashioned out of ancient and new material the vast Benedictine fortress, still impregnable.

"Please remember how our Church insists on liberty of vocation: some Orders arose with one special vocation (plus the main vocation to

monasticism) — education, tending sick and wounded, redemption of captives, preaching, a thousand things, as changing life produced new needs. No one need be a monk: no one need be this or that sort of monk. But the Church insists that he who chooses to seek God along that road must have it open to him.

"The monks you are coming to see are pure contemplatives—and so an Order of much rarer vocation now than the Orders which superadd special activities. For a thousand ordinary priests (what we call secular priests) there may not be one monk of any sort: among ten thousand monks there may not be one Cistercian: only the Church insists that that one must be free to be the thing to which he believes God beckons him. No republic has ever held so valiantly to the individual liberties as the great monarchy of the Catholic Church—a Kingdom in the universe, a Vice-royalty in this far province of earth.

"The Cistercian's life is very austere. He eats no meat, nor eggs; butter, cheese, milk, only at certain seasons. He wears no linen. He toils hard in the field. He rises in the coldest middle of the night and makes worship with his brethren in choir. And he keeps perpetual silence. While the world chatters, he thinks—of God. No doubt a monk will show us over the

monastery: he may speak to us while doing it. The Abbot may speak to his monks when any need for a spoken direction arises: and the monk, needing such, may ask it of him. The master of novices speaks to them, as need is to teach them their way of life, they to him in any doubt of it. But the life of the monastery is silent."

We had all along been in sight of the monastery; and, while the Ancient tried to explain its meaning, forgetting many points that should have been remembered, marring many by haste and shyness and fear of too intolerable a prolixity, his young listeners (especially the youngest) often held their eyes upon its long roofs, and sharp turrets; high up there against the cold skyline it had in its huge bulk something of the air of a fortalice—a strong Castle of God, procalming itself an outpost.

"There is something I should like to add," said the Ancient, "since you listen so patiently." [Chutney shook his head, not protesting impatience or repudiation.] "Here it is. In all Christendom no race of men has been more numerous than that which tills the soil. To some they seem outcast of the social life, not amused by the variety and episode of burgher life; but, anyway, leading lives of great monotony, with backs bent, and eyes turned mostly

downward, towards that dust whence we all come, and whither we all return. Can you not imagine that to every husbandman in our Church it must be a gracious and uplifting thing to remember such a place as we see yonder? Must not its sane and noble infection catch him? 'There,' thinks he, 'are husbandmen like me? Their life of toil in furrow and farmstead is mine. They see no variation but that of the seasons, no more than I: monotony of labour is their lot, as it is mine: looking downward, then, as I delve, can I not be seeing Heaven as they, and growing hourly more at home (like them) with my one neighbour God?' As he trudges homeward through the misty dusk, and hears their bell ring out on the frosty air, *must* he not say, 'I to my hard-earned frugal meal, to my hearth, and to my rest: they, empty-bellied, to their prayer and praise, their brief hard repose, and then their vigil with the Great Sentinel of all,' and *must* he not join his dumb heart in praise with theirs? *Must* not his empty fields seem less lonely? And one last thing before we go up and knock at that door. A thing I have often tried to say . . . in the Catholic Church there is a certain thing, what I call a quality, that arrests every open-eyed man who scans her. *You* have come to see it, since you have been forced to look

at her here in France. It is that quality that preaches louder than any preacher in any pulpit. You, at least, Martin, I *know* have heard its call. Polemics, controversy, special pleading, would simply bore you, and set all your opposition alert on guard. But that quality arrests you; and because it is a *fact,* patent in itself, it impresses you more than any assertion of it could. Well, that quality is one of the heirlooms of the Catholic Church, bequeathed to her by her own children; and lives like those of these monks maintain its store and add to it in every age."

It was snowing fast now, and for a few minutes there wavered a white arras between us and the monastery, now quite near.

When we rang at the outer gate there was a clanging echo, somewhat bleak and empty-sounding. Presently the door opened and we were taken along vaulted, chill corridors of stone, to a stone parlour, with no ornament but the crucifix.

The three young men seemed to catch the Cistercian infection and sat wordless. After a few minutes delay, a monk entered; he only bowed, without speaking, to the four strangers; then the Ancient asked permission to see the abbey. The monk bowed again, and turned to show us out into the corridors, up stone steps,

into a fine cloister. Throughout he only spoke in answer to a question, and then briefly, though not curtly. He was courteous, but grave: aloof, not austere, though nearly; silence was not merely his habit but his atmosphere, and he breathed it, expiring it as well as inhaling: silence was not his prison but his freedom; he escaped out of talk into it whenever his captors let him go.

It was an immense place.

We saw the refectory, vast and fine, with the fineness of complete simplicity, the absence of all ornament or superfluity. On the boards were laid out spoons, forks, mugs, trenchers, for the next meal.

"When will it be?" whispered Chutney. "Ask him."

The Ancient asked.

"To-morrow. At midday."

(Chutney rubbed his nose.)

We saw the chapter-house. And the dormitories—vast and very cold, but airy and intensely clean. And the kitchens, vast ("and unsuggestive of grub," whispered Chutney). And the immense, most beautiful church.

Here our monk pointed to the floor, where a slab recorded that the Drawing Master of the Princesses, daughters of King George III. of

England, lay beneath, and had left his life's earnings towards the building of this fane.

Three monks were praying in the church. One out on the pavement; a very tall man evidently, with a noble face. He never glanced at us, and we hardly presumed to do more than glance at him.

"I never," said Chutney afterwards, "saw a man pray like that. It swallowed him up."

Out in the cloister our monk told us that it was the Abbot.

"He does not, then," said the Ancient, "always wear the cross."*

"He wears it," said the monk, "always."

We saw the library. A fine, panelled room, where nearly a dozen monks were reading: the light was rather dim in there now: and the white figures, dotted here and there, gave a singular impression of stillness: outside there was always the tedious iteration of the war's pulse, the sullen, thick, muffled, beating of the guns. Not one of the monks so much as raised his head to see who entered. To ourselves our coming there seemed as impertinent to their life as the fretful fuming of the war down there in the plains.

* Abbots, like bishops, wear the pectoral cross.

"Have any of your monks gone away as chaplains?" asked the Ancient, when we were all outside in the cloister.

"Some have gone as soldiers. They are in the trenches."

"Ask him," begged Chutney, "about the German prince."

The Ancient asked, repeating the legend of the prince's abduction after death, and then only our monk smiled.

"A prince of Hesse was killed here, two weeks ago. He was never buried here. His officers took him away at once. Others were killed here at the same time—Germans, and French. These we buried here. Come and see."

He led us out into the garden—a large plateau surrounded on three sides by the abbey and its workshops.

"Here," said our monk.

There was a sort of raised mound, perhaps thirty feet long and ten broad: already very neat, and covered with smooth sods. About a dozen and a half of wooden crosses.

"Germans and French together?"

"*In pace,*" said the monk, bowing, with each hand in the opposite sleeve.

No one spoke: and the red sun was slipping down behind the far, flat horizon far beneath us.

The snow had all ceased, and the night came on clear and hard.

"We must pray," whispered the monk at last, "for all. We cannot separate them."

"Absit."

We went straight thence to the gate, where he turned to leave us.

"Shake hands with them all," begged the Ancient in his ear, "they are all Protestants and never saw a Cistercian before."

He drew his cold hands from his sleeves and immediately shook hands with each—not coldly.

"I suppose," said the lad Chutney, "we shall never see each other again."

The monk smiled and lifted a pointing finger towards the sky.

"Well," said Chutney, as we walked quickly down the frozen slope on our homeward way, "one learns a lot."

XIV

CHUTNEY'S MAJORITY

"ONE learns a lot," said Chutney, as we walked down the hill; the frozen stubble, clogged with new snow, hidden, but still stiff enough to crackle a little as it broke under our feet. Eh, how cold one's feet were—always were! "Cold hands, warm heart;" if the saying went "Cold feet, warm heart" the poor Ancient's old heart must have been warm enough in those days.

"Well, one learns a lot," said Chutney, and the lad came closer to his friend's side and, taking his arm, pressed it. *His* hands should have been death-chill, according to the proverb.

Stern nodded, and the New Zealander nodded, but neither spoke.

"Tell us things," begged Chutney. But the Ancient held his peace. Things, thought he, had best be left to tell themselves. They were, he thought, telling themselves; why should he interrupt? The monastery on the bleak ridge

(one huge black bulk now, with black turrets, and the pallid yellow of the sky behind, where sunset had been) was telling things in a poignant Cistercian silence.

Before the last wan relics of the day were huddled behind night's curtain the full moon was casting soft grey shadows, from every tree and hop-hole, over the glistening white slopes. It was all as silent as a great mortuary. St. Bernard seemed for the moment to have laid his finger on the lips of the very guns. And all the silence listened, and to every listener comes the Word.

Because these papers are, in their most ordered sequence but parentheses, and have often followed no sequence at all, I may put in here something that happened several months later.

The Ancient was in Normandy. The day before he had been to seek out the village-home of the soldier farm-lad, Guilbert, of which visit he has spoken long ago. After his talk with Guilbert's mother, and Guilbert's sister, and the lad's small nephew and niece, he had come out into the rather wistful dusk of a dun swift-falling evening; and in a minute or two a young Belgian soldier overtook him.

"Bon soir, Monsieur."

"Bon soir, camarade."

"Eh! Vous êtes donc aussi militaire?"

"Militaire et prêtre, camarade."

"Tiens! Aumônier alors? Bon."

Ranged alongside he kept silence a few steps and then—

"While you were in there *là bas,*" with a jerk of the head sideways and backward over his shoulder, "I watched. I stood outside and watched, through the window. *Indiscret, peut-être?*"

"Ca dépend."

"Eh! Why I watched, it was for no harm."

"So I guessed. Why then?"

"I caught a glimpse, in passing; and I had to come back and look more. That was a *home* in there: en famille, vous savez? That was why I watched. J'avais faim."

He was a stoutish youth, and well fed. It wasn't bread-hunger.

"Nostalgie?"

"C'est ça," said the recruit. And he shook his head with the *staccato,* sharp, gesture of the head in its socket which so often expresses the sentiment of the unsentimental.

"One is far from home here." He went on, "You and I—you English: me Belgian—we are far from ours. That was why I watched. I have often passed the big hotel windows, and I

don't want to watch; though inside one can see the Messieurs dining at pretty tables, and there are silver, and flowers; and you can see them laughing. And it is like that when one passes the big houses. You could often see in through the *persiennes*. I have looked, yes. But a peep is enough. 'Not my world, Jacques,' think I, and go on: not home-sick. To me that is nothing. But yonder" (and again came the backward jerk of the head that had been a little bent). "Là bas. That was like mine. My world. Poor folks *en famille*. So I watched: and when you came out I followed—to get nearer to it. Nostalgie! Oui c'est ça; Monsieur l'Aumônier; dur à supporter."

"Tell me then, about yours—les vôtres. It was to tell *them* about their lad, whom I had *soigné* a little when he was wounded, that I went."

So he told; not much—there was no great matter to tell, though plenty to understand—and the telling comforted him.

"One could not tell it," he ended, "to anyone like an officer or a fine person. But priests—they are like us; of the people. Eh?"

"Yes: always, of the people."

"C'est ça."

"But one should not, perhaps, dislike those

of another class? Not manly that, do you find?"

"Eh non! But the moon up there, I don't dislike it—comprenez vous? It's up there; we're down here, you and I. Eh?"

"Certainly," said the Ancient, laughing, "though we've got to get higher up there than the moon."

"Sans doute," agreed the recruit genially accepting the shy parable. "Bien loin, quand même, eh? Une jolie petite promenade, d'ici jusque là."

Well, that was on the day before.

On *this* afternoon, an afternoon of indolent humid sunshine, and soft moist airs, with a timid promise of spring in it (though the trees were still clad only in their delicate black winter lace against a coldish blue sky) came the Ancient to Arques—Arques la Bataille, as it has been called since Henry of Navarre won, hard by, the victory that was to make him Henry of France.

It was a very odd thing to be there, a vagrant of the war, wandering alone through the vast ruins of the castle whence his forefather had one morning ridden forth for England, never to come back. The place was so lovely that it seemed strange that anyone leaving it could be content never to come back. Perhaps the other vagrant

adventurer, like the soldier yesterday, had had *nostalgie,* and from Devonshire felt his heart-strings tugging, tugging towards the home among these Norman dales where he had been a lad. We do not hear if those grabbing courtiers and cousins of the Base-born brought their mothers with them. The Ancient sat on the ruined drawbridge and looked up at the narrow window of the tower above it, picturing a Norman mother's face there as her lad gave his back to her, to go and snatch lands from peaceful Saxon Thanes who had done him never a harm. Eh, what a wistful face, what tremulous brave lips, what love-hungry ears: what a standard of renunciation the little waving rag of white linen —the Ancient hoped that the light-hearted adventurer had grace enough to turn in his saddle and signal back fidelity.

An immense space do the ruins cover: and all around them a wide, very deep moat, dry now, and one supposes always dry. From the further lip of the moat are exquisite views on every side. On one, the broad and stately valley, meads and river, woodland and opposing hill. At the foot of the steep, the shining white town, and the shining white church. Backward of the fortalice a net of deep dales, where rich pasture and rich copse strive in peacefullest combat for beauty.

Down into one of these twisting, steeply tilted valleys clambered the Ancient, setting himself a certain point of high woodland as his point of attainment. There arrived, he would go no further, but sit and read. An English newspaper unopened, a French volume of "Mémoires Intimes" half read, were under his arm: a singular contrast those two documents. One a gasp of announcement: as though one should stick his sword into the seething stew of the War-Pot and snatch out a bit, and hold it up to brag about, or to explain why it was not bigger: terribly hasty, partial, perhaps incorrect, but actual, eager, half-blind, with a stumbling suspense, as a man running who can scarce see for the blood in his eyes. The other, the French book, stuffed with snippets, *all* detail, all preoccupation with indoor matters and not a suspicion of a great outside world crying Fudge! like Mr. Burchell. Elsewhere has the writer quoted the shrewd judgment of him who found Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" the best spiritual reading he knew: let him read the Memoirs of his fellow-duke. Let anyone who would taste how sour a mean worldliness can taste in the mouth read St. Simon: proud reading, I should say, for a republican ashamed of petty republican jostlings. How the lean-eyed jealous courtier

hates the King, and must flutter round him, and think, think, think of him always. The sun outside, and the sane wholesome green world outside, are nothing to him; the Roi Soleil inside, and his fusty bad-hearted world inside, are everything to him. The favour of the man he dislikes and despises, which he has not, and which he knows he will never get, are his bread and wine to hunger for. Faugh ! what a devil's sacrament ! Of his own good parts he is much aware—and content to let them run to a rotten seed. Decent, he is well-pleased to breathe an indecent air; honest enough at heart, he willingly neighbours with dishonesty: till he does not know when he is spiteful, secret slanderer, blood-poisoned with the disease of the body whereof he insists on being a limb—or some trivial unregarded member. . . .

Down the steep slope of short, dry down-grass clambered the Ancient, and St. Simon slipping from under his arm goes skipping down before him. A wounded soldier, *en convalescence* home from the war, with one eye left, stands still in the road below to pick the duke up and restore him to his owner. He has a crutch also, for the bones in one foot are shattered.

" In a hurry—like the book, Monsieur ?"

" Not a bit," says the Ancient, arriving, and

laughing. "But once you go downhill you can't choose your own pace, or exactly where you'll stop. N'est-ce pas?"

"Monsieur est philosophe?"

"Pas beaucoup. Mais experimenté. . . ."

"Well," said the soldier, squeezing a double smile out of his one eye, "after that—*I* was going down-hill: home——"

"Home is up-hill," and they both laughed.

"Bon! But now I will turn and *me promener* with Monsieur (if he permits always). It is pretty up there," nodding towards the crest of the road.

"So I guessed. I was going there to read."

A cart came by, laden with logs, and the waggoner (a lad whose limbs wanted screwing up like neglected fiddle-strings) called out to the soldier, and they exchanged a dozen words in Norman patois—not the prettiest in France.

"Eh well," said the soldier presently, when the cart and waggoner had gone down the road. "*His* turn will come soon. He won't be carting logs much longer. *I* used to do that. Now I'm an *artilleur* and one of my eyes is peering about under the ground to see where *I* am. He shan't find me just yet."

"Espérons."

"Pas de luxe, là bas," observed the soldier, waving his crutch towards the war.

"So I found."

So we talked of our small experiences, and, as no one was listening, no one was bored. We talked of many things. He asked about my book, seeing that it was French. Who wrote it, what was it about? Then—

"Louis XIV., he was very small, wasn't he?"

"Uncommon small. Le grand Monarque."

"Eh, mon philosophe? And Napoleon—little too?"

"About up to there," and the Ancient indicated, with his still unopened newspaper, a button which was by no means the top button of the artilleryman's blackish-blue jacket.

"Voilà! For me it is hopeless. Those famous persons were all little creatures. I am too big—*hors concours.*"

It did not seem to trouble him. He remained impregnably cheerful.

"Long legs," suggested the Ancient, "are not bad for marching—uphill."

"But big legs have big bodies to carry—uphill (Eh, mon philosophe, je vous comprends bien; vous insinuez quelqu' allégorie). And my body, to me, is heavy for my big legs to carry—uphill."

"Let your soul help. Make it. That's what it's for. Say to her 'Madame. This body of mine can't carry itself and you. You'll get a spill if you lie asleep up there. Be so good as to get down and pull.'"

So they talked: the huge, gentle lad knowing well that it was a sort of fencing, and liking it; not disliking it if he got a little thrust near enough to the heart that was there in him.

They came to the crest of the road. A copse on the left, and a quarry in front where an old bent peasant was loading a long narrow cart. To the right, bulging meadows that leant out over the dale, and beyond them another copse. At the top a road full of mysterious interest—because the Ancient knew he should never walk along it, or see what was round the first corner.

"Now," said the soldier, "Monsieur wants to read—and look; in there is a fallen tree cut down by some Frenchman (are we not careful for Monsieur, we other Frenchmen ?) for Monsieur to sit upon. As for me I will go on up there, and round by another way that I know, so that Mon Philosophe may not have to see me going downhill home."

He held out his big hand, and his smile was very kind: in his one eye there was not room for

it, nor even on his mouth, it seemed to be in his hand too.

"Only one little eye," he said, and his laugh was only his smile made audible, "but with it I shall go on seeing Monsieur, mon petit Philosophe. (No offence—Napoleon was little! we settled that, n'est-ce pas?) But there are two ears still, and they shall go on listening to all the things Monsieur never said. I am not entirely *bête;* I can understand. The unsaid things are the best of the sermon sometimes."

"But it is you who preach."

"Me preach! I do not even practice."

"Both, I think. To me your one eye preaches, and your merry limp. I also have been listening."

So he went; and the Ancient watched him till the twist of the road hid him. He whistled *Tipperary* out of compliment, thinking it perhaps our *Marseillaise.* At the corner he waved his crutch and saluted, and the crutch itself seemed part of his smile.

The Ancient went into the copse and sat down upon the fallen tree. Truant-thoughted always, there ran into his mind, not the words (for he has an untextual, unquoting memory) but the idea in the words of a delighful American: "Preachers must surely be in great danger of

perishing for lack of spiritual instruction, from only hearing themselves." Ah, but did not the witty American forget the sermons that preachers are always meeting in the lives and faces of those who cross their daily path?

One cannot learn everything at once or from the same teacher, nor has every man all the gifts of God. Those he has (the one he has, if it seems to us that he has only one) he must share with us if we know we need it.

The old man's cart was full, and he had led it lumbering down the road. There was no sound for a while; then came the rap-tap of a woodpecker.

"'The woodpecker tapping the hollow *elm* tree,' observed Mrs. Mould," thought the Ancient. "'Ha, ha,' laughed Mr. Mould, closing his eyes in a perfect luxury, 'we shall be glad to hear from you again, Mrs. M. Hollow elm tree, eh! Ha, ha. . . . I've seen worse than that in the Sunday papers, my love.' How Dickens revelled in undertakers — the Moulds, the Orams. . . ."

So the Ancient tore open his newspaper and fell to reading: but the flutter of the big white leaves sent the woodpecker away, and there was no sound at all.

The Ancient was reading of the Dardanelles;

but in his thoughts Chutney was gently moving, and his smile looked out between the printed words. On the night which was the last before the Ancient left the unit, just as he was beginning to undress, a knock had come to his door—in his bedroom at the Convent in St. J., and Chutney came in, shy and not merry.

"I had to come and say good-bye alone," he said. "I hope you do not mind? Dear Monsignor! I wonder if you realize what it will be here without you? If you don't, you're the only one that doesn't. And no one of them all will miss you as I shall. You think it is not so. I haven't seen half as much of you as some of them: but not because I didn't want to. I'm not so clever as some of them. I couldn't talk to you about books and things; and I didn't want to bore you. But, dear Monsignor, all my happiest times out here have been with you. All. And—not one of them loves you as I do—not one."

He turned quickly to the door, and made no pretence of doing anything else with his fingers than what they *were* doing with the tears on his boyish cheeks.

The Ancient tried to thank him, and the lad said,

"Oh yes! If we do not meet again it will not

be my fault. When the war is over may I come and see you in your home? I wouldn't stay too long."

"Indeed, indeed, Chutney, we must meet again. At home. Happier days than these. A happier place."

Of this was the Ancient thinking while he read of Gallipoli. And his eye fell down the printed sheet and there was the lad's name: his real name: and a date: the date on which the baby of our unit had attained his majority—killed in action in performance of his heroic, merciful duty, for to heal wounds, not to make them, was his war-task.

. . . . . .

It was very long before the Ancient left his place in the quiet wood. But there had been no more reading. As easily could he have read St. Simon in a church where they were singing *Requiem*. If remembering and loving be indeed as well worth laying by our dead as flowers, whose sweetness will presently change to ill odours of decay, then was not the poor Ancient wasteful of time during those sad hours that he sat there all alone with grief.

Are they not over ready to chide us for yielding to sorrow? He who lets the cause of our pain come to us must know that the pain will

come, and mean it also. If we turn too hardily from it are we not likely to miss what it came to do for us? They do not expect us to receive without anguish sharp wounds in the rest of us, but wounds in our heart we are bidden to treat as if the pain were subjective and voluntary, a pain that need only be there while we yield to it. No doctor is brutal enough to chide us for suffering in our body, or bid us cast the agony away as if it were a morbid, self-invited misery.

Are men so unselfish that *really* there is commonly much danger of our feeling too greatly blows that have not touched our own skin?

If we could always cry "Come! *I* am alive still. It is only another man who is dead. *My* time isn't shortened. Nothing has been taken of *mine;* let me hurry on lest my pleasures and profit get on too far for me to overtake them:" would it be good for us?

I do not believe much in his power of sympathy who refuses to suffer except in the material part of him.

It was dusk before the Ancient found himself walking down the steep hill that is the village street of Arques: a dusk, chill and with a rising of dank mist in it, more proper to the season than the humid sunshine of the early afternoon had been.

At the door of a long white house, a door up four steps from the street, stood an elderly woman knitting and talking over her shoulder to someone inside.

Over her head hung a little faded bush.

"Monsieur," said she, "one does not only sell wine here. Tea also. English tea."

"We do not grow tea in England," confessed the Ancient, with meek disavowal of his country's greatness.

"Tiens!"

"But we certainly like it. If you please I will see what English tea is like. Once, Madame, in Egypt I was going to buy a very queer antique Egyptian pot, but remarked *par parenthèse* that it was ugly all the same. 'Ugly!' cried the vendor much offended, 'Tis not *my* taste. *I* did not manufacture this antique. It was made in Birmingham—the English taste I supposed.'"

"Nor did I make the English tea I sell," said the matron, laughing. "I supposed they made it in London."

"Let us hope not."

It was excellent tea; quite strong; and the woman was an excellent woman too. She said times were very hard for her trade—for everyone's trade in such a place as Arques, where

nothing that was wanted in the war was made—except young men and they were all gone. Her sons were gone, and her nephews, also the sons of her stepmother (who were decent fellows considering). It was hard to make enough *sous* to make *francs* with, and *sous* didn't buy much these times. And one liked to send parcels to one's sons *là bas* at the war, with *gourmandises* in them. A customer was almost a gift of the Tout-Puissant.

"Come! I have also English Kekk," she remembered. "'Auntly Kekk."

And from a cupboard she produced a cake with the flavour of that ilk.

"Before the war English travellers came here: and this one I bought in Dieppe. Real 'Auntly Kekk."

Huntley and Palmer's grease-proof paper still clung to it like a cerement.

"But," said Madame presently, "I *ennuie* Monsieur."

"No, Madame. It is very kind of you to talk."

"Ah, then! Monsieur is *triste*. Him also the war has hurt? Forgive me! One's own pin scratches, but one knows not what knife may have cut in under another person's cloak. So one talks, and is a *gêne*."

"No, Madame. There is no *gêne* in kindliness. But I have just read of the death of one who was very young, whom I knew, and loved."

"Everywhere! Everywhere!" she said, in a low plain voice, and shook her head. Then gently went out of the little parlour back into the house-place, where her husband was.

When the Ancient called her back to ask what he owed her, her little girl came with her, clinging to her gown.

"Nothing," said the mother. "I do not want Monsieur to pay anything."

Sympathy can afford to dress herself oddly. This was Madame's way.

"But, no," said the Ancient, "you do not think it would comfort me to remember this *petite* and know that some of the bread you find it so hard to earn for her *I* had swallowed?"

"Eh, it *is* hard to earn the bread. But I did wish Monsieur would just be my guest (a poor woman's guest) this one time."

The little girl, with broad blue Norman eyes, lifted her fat fist to her mother, pulling her mother's apron over it to hide it, with the other hand.

"Ah, Monsieur! that's as bad. Much worse: for it is double what I could have asked for the tea."

"Not worse at all. It is the beginning of her *dot.*"

Our argument was interrupted by the arrival of another customer in the house-place where the little bar was. He greeted Madame's husband, and her small daughter said,

"It is our big Paul."

"The son of my husband's sister," observed Madame.

The little girl trotted out to him: and showed him her *dot.* Which brought him to us. It was my big artilleryman. Indoors he looked bigger than ever.

His aunt and he exchanged a few words in Norman *patois* unintelligible to the Ancient, the little girl listening with grave eyes.

"I must go," said the Ancient.

"I should have asked if I might walk with you as far as to the *gare:*" said the big Paul, "but, alas, you have another companion since we parted."

All the eyes in Arques could not have held more gentle sympathy than this one: the mother was softly stroking the flaxen hair of her *petite,* and the silent, quiet caress was somehow sympathy too.

"I should like you to come with me," said the Ancient. "That companion of whom you

speak, *la tristesse*, comes often in these days. One makes no stranger of her. Ah—if it were only to me she came !''

So we went out together, and were friends. But after that day we never met again, for the Ancient had not the heart to go back soon to Arques, and in a little while he was called away to another part of France.

XV

ON THE BRIDGE

One afternoon the Ancient found himself, for the first time in many years, in Paris. *Through* it he had often passed, southward for Italy, or Switzerland, or the Pyrenees; or south-east for Germany; or on his way from England, to a French country house: but on all those occasions he had simply driven from one railway-station to another without a pause: it was many, many years since he had walked the Paris streets, or lingered by the Seine, or entered any church, or public building, of the great city.

There is much in Paris that, seen once, is indelible from memory—the island of the Seine, and Notre Dame; the river-front of the Louvre (in spite of Louis Philippe and his L.'s), or its inner arms stretched out to the Carrousel; the Place de la Concorde, and the view from it, up the slack bowstring of the Elysées, towards the Arc de Triomphe: but after so long an absence

much was forgotten, and there was change enough too.

Standing at the base of the Egyptian Obelisk that marks the death-place of the Monarchy, the Ancient had nothing between him and the Carrousel-Arch but that endless monotone of flat garden which he had known broken by the stark, charred ruin of the Tuileries. With that to his left, there were new palaces to his right, and a new bridge, with grandiose gold and marble boundary pillars, like huge gateposts without a gate.

Behind Notre Dame the Ancient had sought out the "little Doric Morgue" and had not found it: in spite of Browning's boasting first line in his small great poem. Now he would go and find something that could hardly need much seeking—the way must be across the new bridge. A very splendid bridge, with more splendid views in every direction from it up river and down, forwards towards the vast empty space in front of the Invalides, and backward whence the Ancient had come.

Almost everyone crossing it was in uniform: as was he: but many of the others were wounded.

"That certainly," thought the Ancient, "is the Invalides. There are plenty of domes, but there's no mistaking *that* dome."

He stood still, not for uncertainty, but to take in the wonderful reach of river, and the huge pearls of the buildings shimmering out of a tenuous opaline scarf of mist.

"Is Monsieur seeking a direction?" asked an artilleryman, saluting and smiling.

"Well, you can make my certainty more sure. I am on a little pilgrimage; and the object of my pilgrimage lies, I feel sure, under that golden dome?"

"The Emperor! Oh yes. He is there. That is the Invalides."

He was standing still, and now turned.

"May I go with you, mon Colonel, and join my homage?" he asked.

English officers in uniform are not supposed to walk the streets with soldiers: but to say so seemed but a poor response to the lad's eager kindliness, especially as he must know the regulations without reminder.

"The Emperor," said he, "was a little artilleryman himself, and I should think he would like the homage of an English Colonel and a French artiflot offered together. May I come?"

So they went together. And presently the Ancient knew all about his young guide and companion. François his *nom de baptême,* his age twenty, his home Lyons, where he and his

mother kept a little shop together. *La Veuve Gorsse,* her name. Of rather a good family—not noble, mind you, but *bien élevée; feu M. Gorse* dead since François was a baby in the young wife's arms. They were very happy, he and his mother. Of course she had memories—but he had only hopes, and in them her memories had resurrection.

"Is it not wonderful, mon Colonel? *Ces femmes?* they love, and God beckons a little finger to the one they love, and they lose him, and their heart breaks: then they look in their baby's eyes, and read a message, and a mandate, and the baby's tearless eyes dry *their* eyes, tear-drowned, and they gather the broken bits of their hearts and piece them together, and build a temple for the baby to live in, and they live in it too. And Memory lives in it, between them, though the baby only sees her now and then. The baby only has hopes, he. But the mother plaits them and her memories together, until at last all her memories have grown into hopes too. Is it not? I cannot tell you, my Colonel, how happy we are. We are poor folk; not *very* poor, we have all we need, and enough to help others with: only, all we have we earn. It is more interesting, eh? A piece of bread you earn is a bit of your history. Is it not?"

Over and over again the lad spoke of their happiness: and once, the Ancient, heathenishly, shuddered: as though dreading the eavesdropping of Nemesis.

A great crowd was passing out of the gates of the Invalides, a greater moving in. One had to go slowly, and still the lad chattered on. His voice was vibrant with life and gaiety, and he smiled again and again for sheer friendly happiness and goodwill. He was very *méridional;* not swarthy at all, or even dark; but small, compactly knit, all his little figure set on wires, and every gesture a whole sentence, every syllable of which was a nerve.

The large, somewhat austere, inner quadrangle was full of people: in one corner were a number of German guns, in another several captured aeroplanes. There was much comment, but low-voiced: no gabble, or shrill chatter. Of the women who looked at the guns most were in mourning: the pressing crowd made way for them, but hardly noticeably. A young widow close to us seemed scarcely to turn her eyes to the guns, but bent them on her tiny son, who leant against her dress. She drew the child away very soon, tearless, with a singular grave dignity in her immovable white face.

"Perhaps one of those things," said François,

when she was lost in the crowd, " made her *petit* fatherless. He will not forget. . . ."

To the Ancient it seemed that everyone was doing the same thing: not gabbling, but remembering.

" Yesterday," said François, " I came here, and saw a General give medals. Gallieni, I think: a fine face: a fine man. Slim, lean, like a lean dog that will not tire till he has his teeth in the beast he follows. A soldier all over him. You saw it in his back, in his eyes, in his mouth. There wasn't much talk in his mouth. 'Soldiers,' said he, 'you know what *they* have done' (a finger pointing to those guns); 'how they and others like them have turned French homes into stone-heaps. You know that a *sang impur* stains our land: but your own blood has flowed, and will flow, to erase that foul stain from our soil of France. I am proud that France uses my hands to-day to set near your hearts the symbol of the maternal gratitude with which her own heart is full towards you and your million comrades. While your heart beats it will keep time with the pulse of the Great Heart of France, and should the signal sound for it to cease to beat, on some other field than that where already France has seen your glory, you

will know that in the shrine of Her Heart your name shall be immortal.' ''

So they, the Ancient and the widow's young hope, gave themselves to the stream that pressed on, through the dim, gaunt passages of the great hospice of heroes, to the sleeping chamber of the Arch-hero.

The light there is always unearthly, not pallid, but half-cloistral: a very singular light that seems at every hour to be that of Dawn.

The silence of the place is as poignant as its light: and folds into itself the only sound there ever is, that of reverent feet: for no voice is ever there for Echo to report, but that of Fame; and she stands brooding there, as though her work were done and lay finished in yonder tomb, breathing a name with every pulse of her undying heart.

. . . . . .

Out into the spring sunshine the Ancient and his new friend came together.

" You have been there before ?'' asked the lad.

" Very often. But not for many years. And every time the same shame is on me. Do you know how I, an Englishman, spell shame ?''

" How, Monsieur ?''

" Ste. Hélène. Nothing we can ever do, or write, will alter it. He was never our captive.

We never leapt into the sky and caught your Eagle. He flew to us, in the name of our island hospitality: and our hospitality was that rock and its pitiful, vulgar vexings of his end. I wish Dante had waited to write till he could have put Sir Hudson Lowe in his Inferno, with his own name scrawled round his hollow head on a red tape for punishment."

They walked on, and the lad declared that his new friend ought to see the gardens of the Luxembourg—the most delightful spot, said he in Paris. So thither they went, though the Ancient was very far from thinking those gardens the beauty-spot of Paris. Thence, through the Latin quarter, they walked to the Panthéon, but found it closed. In one of the half-empty streets (the Latinists all gone, I suppose, to the war) they met two elderly priests making their afternoon promenade. They stood still and looked after the Ancient and the young Lyonnais, smiling kindly.

"Tiens!" said one of them. "That is good to see. *Voilà l'Entente!*"

"*L'Entente Cordiale illustrée,*" agreed the other, nodding his head cheerfully, up and down.

The Ancient saluted, and then they took off their big hats and bowed very low. Of course François saluted too.

"Good people those," he observed, when all our little ceremonies were over and we had moved on.

"In England," said the Ancient laughing, "we think all our priests good."

"Oh yes! And we are good Catholics, my mother and I. I was brought up to respect them—I meant kind, warm-hearted folk, those two. They love soldiers—one could see that—and it pleased them to see a little French soldier walking with an English *militaire.*"

"They will put you in their breviaries like an *image.*"

"Tant mieux! It is good to have one's name mentioned—up there. My father is there—but perhaps they think 'Oh yes; of course! Fathers will say anything of their only son.'"

Then the lad talked again of his mother, and of a little girl she had adopted.

"That was when I was a young boy," he said, "before I could earn anything. She asked if I minded. For, of course, we hadn't much to spare then. But that *petite* had no one; and my mother longed to take the little helpless one and make a daughter of her. Of course I did not mind. And now she is a big girl, and altogether good. Now that I have had to come away to go to the war my mother has her to comfort her,

and is not all alone. I suppose God thought of that all along."

We went into a little quiet café, and had coffee together, and the lad wanted to pay—out of a tiny, lean purse. But the Ancient explained that it was the old person who always did the paying.

It is not necessary to repeat all the young soldier said. He had a very sweet and honest heart, but he was, it seemed, wild; or had been. He thought youth the season of pleasure, and it was not difficult to see that he ran wherever pleasure called.

He did not perceive that his Colonel was something else: he saw only the khaki and the badges, and seemed to have no idea as to the meaning of the little patch of ruddy purple at the throat. So he rattled. And the Ancient, weighing it all, resolved to say nothing: because of something he was resolved to say.

"François," he said at last, "are you going to the front?"

"Yes, my Colonel. To-morrow, or the next day."

"And shall you go to confession first?"

"To confession!"

"Yes. You seem to have been a wild boy: is it long since you confessed yourself?"

"Long! Yes. Many, many years. Not since I was a little boy.

"And you have done much to confess."

"Oh, plenty."

Then he laughed: his laughter ringing out, with frankest merriment.

"Oh you English!" he cried. "Always the same. Always practical! You are Catholic—and the Catholic Church says 'Confess yourself': so you say no more, but do it. It is splendid. But it is not like us other French. We recognize a principle—Yes: not to do that is blind: a want of logic. But you put the principle at once into practice: we not. I am thoroughly Catholic: I believe: I would go to Mass if anyone tried to stop me going. But to confess! Oh you English! I am twenty years old. That is not the season for confession. It is the season for doing the things to confess——"

"When?"

"Plus tard."

"There may be no *'plus tard.'* I have been lately where you go to-morrow or next day. I know what it is like. You cannot know till you see. There you will meet the enemy. You will meet God too, as you have not met Him, perhaps, anywhere before. He gives you *rendezvous:*

if you do not keep it you may never meet Him again: never: not in all Eternity."

"My Colonel! my dear friend of one afternoon, are you not solemn?"

"Life is solemn. You will see how solemn when you get where you go to-morrow. You told me just now that the war forced men to think, and that you had put your little affairs in order. Set your great things in order too. I am sure that is why we met on yonder bridge, and became in a moment friends—that I might tell you this. We are comrades: an old *militaire* and a young: comrades may say to each other all that jumps into their mouths out of their hearts. I am sure you are not angry."

"Angry! No! How could you make me angry? I never saw you till two hours ago, and now I feel as if had loved you all my life. But what you ask is contrary to all my habits. My mother has asked it a thousand times, and I only kissed her, and laughed, and said 'Maman, I am young yet. Let me alone. I must run about awhile.' Only you must not think I am angry."

Again he laughed merrily.

"It is because you are so English that I laugh. And I thought you so wonderfully French. I suppose that is why you do things,

you English—because you are so definite: so practical."

"It doesn't seem to me practical, certainly, to set one's small matters in order and leave one's great matters unsettled, in disorder, for chance to arrange. Chance arranges nothing. If you were dying of a sickness you would send for a priest?"

"Bien, sûr. I am a good Catholic."

"And you may be dying now: in spite of the sun and gay air, and your strong health, and laughter. Think of it. I will say no more."

The Ancient felt almost sure of one thing—the lad, though he would have listened politely, would have paid no heed at all had he supposed that he was listening to a priest's advice: it would have been a professionalism, mere words of course. Such advice coming from another soldier, though an old one, would have a different appeal: would it have effect as well as weight?

All the rest of the afternoon they spent together: and of that matter of confession no other word was said, though François often broke into a laugh and the Ancient knew he was thinking of it. Almost all the lad's talk was of his home,

and of his mother; less often of his adopted sister.

At last he and the Ancient parted.

"Here is my name and address," said the Ancient, scribbling on a scrap of paper his surname only, *sans titre,* and the place where he was living. This he folded round a crucifix, and a medal of God's Mother.

"I will write to you," the lad promised, "from the trenches. And this is my mother's address—would you write to her and tell her you saw me, and that I was well, and happy?"

The Ancient promised, and they shook hands and parted, never to meet again here.

Less than a week afterwards the Ancient had a letter from the boy.

"It is all as you said," he wrote. "There were twenty-nine of us, here where I am, when I joined. Nine are killed. But I want at once to tell you something, my Colonel and comrade and friend; the very day I reached this place I found a village church with a priest in it, and I confessed myself, and next morning I received the good God. And, please, send me little crosses, like the one you gave me, and medals of the Holy Virgin, for I want to give them to

my comrades. I persuaded nearly all of those nine who are now killed to confess themselves. I will persuade others. What you said is true: God gave me *rendezvous* here: I am glad I did not fail to keep tryst. I suppose that was why you and I met on the bridge. Do write soon, soon, soon. And send me those things. And write to my mother and tell her (though I have told her) that I have done what you asked. She will not be jealous that I should have done for you what I always refused to do for her. She will be *pénétrée* with joy. You seem women and priests always ask such things, and one smiles and puts it aside: but when another soldier asks it is different: after you had gone away, in Paris on Monday night, I felt very lonely. I wanted to run after you. All Paris seemed empty. And your voice went on in my ears always saying the same thing. And coming up here in the train it was the same. But, though I pretended to myself to laugh at my English Colonel's queer practical ideas, I had (I am sure) given up struggling even before I left Paris. I knew I should do what you asked—but not there. You said God had given me *rendezvous,* here in the battle-field, and I came here knowing I should find Him waiting, and I knew I would have to give in and come to Him. I am very happy.

To-morrow I shall receive the good God again. Write soon, soon, soon. Your little comrade, François."

The Ancient made a fat parcel of crosses, scapulars, rosaries, and medals, and sent it: and of course he wrote. And he wrote to the widowed mother of the boy, and received from her a wonderful letter of joy and gratitude and fear. She said how tender and sweet her lad had always been, how loving and devoted, how hard-working for her, and self-denying, but exuberant with youth and vitality, and so, wayward; she could find no words to express her deep thankfulness that he had, after so many years' neglect, confessed himself and received Our Lord. But she could hardly think for terror: every moment was a horror of suspense. . . .

Another letter came from the lad written very soon after the first; full of buoyant hope and courage, and beating (as every French soldier's letters beat) like a pulse, with a passion of love for France. Can the sons of a mother who has never known anything but secure prosperity feel exactly that sort of agony of love and worship? Each separate French heart seems to feel that the wounds in the breast of France, their outraged mother, dealt there by the same

enemy before and now, can hardly be healed without the outpouring of its own blood.

Then three weeks passed, and no letter came, and the Ancient's heart sank within him. That François would forget, or be lazy, he knew was not possible. At last he could bear the suspense no longer, and wrote to the lad's Commanding Officer. Between the sending of that letter and the receipt of a reply came one from Lyons, from Madame Gorsse, terror-stricken. She had heard nothing, for near three weeks; had Monsignor heard?

Then came the answer from the Commanding Officer: the young soldier Gorsse had been killed, doing his duty, on such a day, and his comrades had laid his shattered body to rest in the holy ground by the little church of——. The lad's mother had already been told.

To write to her was almost impossible but not so impossible as not to write. In what words could any writer deal with a sorrow so overwhelming as the Ancient knew hers must be? But to stand silent, for dread and shyness, would be the abyss of selfishness.

The poor woman's answer was hard to read: she was, plainly, heart-broken: and out of her broken heart the words came in an awful cry of agony. That her boy had given his life for

France was her pride, but could not yet be her comfort. I dare not try to say more of that letter—those letters, for many came, and come still.

Does any reader remember a young Savoyard Sergeant whom the Ancient had *soigné* in the hospital at B. in October, 1914? He was in depôt at Lyons, and to him the Ancient wrote, asking him to do a very difficult thing.

"I know," he confessed, in asking it, "how hard it is: to bid a young soldier like you go and seek out this stricken mother, to whom you are a stranger, and speak to her in her terrible anguish. But, if you would do that great act of charity, I am sure it would comfort her as nothing else might: just *because* you are, like her son, young and a soldier."

The Ancient was sure he would go: there was something chivalrous and fine in his character (is it not in the character of every French soldier?) that would draw him to the side of the lonely mother: the Ancient could picture his manly, respectful, sympathy, and deep reverence. He did go: and the mother wrote of his visit with a noble appreciation and wonderful depth of gratitude. As for him, his letter was like one written by a man who has just come out of a holy place.

Should any French men or women ever read these papers the writer of them hopes that, with the singular sure instinct of their race, they will find in them a very humble, but very reverent, act of love and veneration for the great heart of the French people.

CHAPTER XVI

FINIS

For the last time those patient and kindly people who have been his readers for nearly two years foregather with the Ancient, and to him the parting is grievous. As the papers themselves tell of many a friend made by the war's wayside, so have other friends been made by him in the telling: those wayside friends were, in many an instance, seen but once, though for ever to be remembered; these latter friends have never been seen at all, but from home, from beloved France, from America—Northern and Latin—they have written, often with that special warmth of generous intimacy that even shy people find possible when addressing one whom they will not count a stranger but whom they feel sure of never meeting except in his printed page.

The thought of meeting them again in that fashion has given to the writing of the later of these papers a peculiar pleasure; and the thought

of so meeting them no more comes to the writer as reluctantly as that of any other parting. Besides, the closing of the series seems like a second and more final farewell to those other friends of which the papers themselves describe (very hurriedly) the welcome arrival.

Very soon these loosely strung leaves will be clipped together in a book, and no book of the writer's ever took so long in the making as this one will have done: so that much more has happened during the writing of its pages than ever was the case in the instance of any other book of his—and one thing in especial, a thing dreaded through all his life, a thing that must make whatever may remain to him of life wholly different from the long years before. For his first remembered impression of life was the realization that he was his mother's son, and almost the next his realization of the terror lest he should lose her. The dread of that loss remained ever afterwards the only real dread of his life: no sorrow, no misfortune, threatened or fallen, seemed to affect the *substance* of happiness so long as that supreme calamity was spared. For fifty-eight years it was spared, and for that immense reprieve he can but cry his thanks to Divine patience. That the calamity fell upon his life during the writing of these

pages must make this, to him, a different sort of book from any that he has written, must make of the whole book a lingering farewell.

I trust no critics will turn to this particular page: it is not for their reading, but a private message to those gentle, kindly, patient readers of whom I have spoken above. And they, I think, will make excuse if this last chapter is one, not so much of added episode as of retrospect—long, wistful, backward glances, over travelled ground——

Our unit mobilized in Dublin, its *rendezvous* a sunny plat of ground in Phœnix Park hard by the Chief Secretary's Lodge: the sight of that house filled the Ancient's breast with regrets that the irresistable author of *Obiter Dicta* and *Res Judicatæ* should ever have left his native, sunny fields of letters for the sour, storm-bound, thankless exile of politics and state-craft.

But to no regrets was the (still unchristened) Ancient left long a prey: by a happy accident his presence became known, within an hour or two of his arrival, to the Jesuits of Gardiner Street, and forthwith was he snatched up and clutched close in the warm arms of their hospitality. Is anything on earth more hospitable than an Irishman? Is there anything like the hospitality of Jesuits? And the combination of

Irishman and Jesuit produced a result that leaves in the mind of the petted Ancient an unforgettable picture. Is not the essence of hospitality the giving of the impression of welcome? And that impression was imprinted, deep and indelible, on every moment of those six and thirty hours. Yes, there is another priceless ingredient in the most treasured hospitality—when it carries the conviction not only of welcome but of affection. And the Ancient, old and battered, was made in every moment to feel (by men born when he was a grown lad) like a beloved younger brother being equipped for war by the tenderness of loving kindred. *All* showed this: but by none was it shown more touchingly than by the Provencial—who seemed a fascinating youth to his guest—and by one young Father who has now for very long been himself a chaplain in the foremost of the front.

It was only on the morning of departure that the Ancient, at his first meal in camp, met all his brother-officers together. They were all strangers and unknown to him then, and on that occasion they did not say very much to him: each perhaps was thinking of his own home and friends from whom he had just parted. *Of* the Ancient they had already said, as they confessed afterwards, "How can that old man

be expected to stand it? Has the War Office ever seen him?"

The park, as we left it in the shining August morning, seemed oddly, touchingly lovely: and the Ancient looked his last of it with many a thought of a dear and dead, very gracious, kinswoman whose guest he had been there in the unvexed days of peace that seemed already historic and classic.

Going down to our somewhat distant place of embarkation, on the opposite side of the city, all along its quays and streets, we made a long and pretty slow procession. People crowded to watch us go, and endless were the salutes and blessings they gave the Ancient as they caught sight of him. "God bless you, Father dear, and bring you safe home." May God bless *them,* and bring them also peace.

It was a long business embarking, but done at last. Then sirens squealed uncouth farewells, a band or a bit of a band played, soldiers cheered, women waved and wept, and turned to their fathers' arms, or bent to dry their children's eyes, their own streaming; some struck up *Auld Lang Syne,* and sang as much of it as they knew by heart, and our ship slowly moved out into the water-way, and with ever gathering purpose and speed turned seawards and away.

The bay of Dublin! Howth and Ireland's Eye, the Wicklow mountains, and the Dublin mountains; would one ever see them again? All the Irish half of me yearned to it all—of what nation on earth am I? Two Irish grandparents, one English, one Welsh: and priceless, countless French friends, and surely one's friendships have something to say to one's nationality as well as one's kinships.

That setting sail brought back ever so vividly three sailings for India when the Ancient was beginning his army life, when so much the biggest half of life lay still in front: Were we going to India now? No one knew; the Captain's orders were sealed and were not opened yet: some said we were: some said Belgium, some France; it was all guessing. Anyway, we turned south and east, and into the west Ireland and the August day sank together. Our unit was an Irish one, and a large proportion of the men were Catholics—only one of the officers. Next morning the Ancient was allowed to get his men together and speak to them; of what lay before them, and what it behoved them to do. For almost all the rest of the voyage they were coming to him, in his cabin, to confession. I think they all came.

We sailed on Tuesday evening: on Thursday

morning we were turning into Havre, the French folk on the quays watching our arrival in this new *rôle* with a grave appreciation. The coming of British troops to France had not always been exactly the arrival of brothers.

It was not till late evening that we reached our rest-camp outside Havre. We stayed there two nights, and on Saturday entrained for—we knew not where. On Sunday we detrained at Valenciennes and marched to Jenlain: before midday on Monday we were at La Rosière by Mons: and so we were "at the war" as our French friends called it.

The first cold *douche* was the order to retire from La Rosière. With more than one wayside halt we came at half-past six in the evening to Villerspol, and thought to bivouac there for the night in an orchard of crowded trees. But about nine there came the sudden order to be off, and there was no camp that night: through the moonless dark, and dust, and thunderous heat, we marched; and finally, long after midnight, were told to rest in our tracks by the roadside—near Villereau. About four a.m. we were off again, and twelve hours later came to our halt near Troisville. Our first batch of wounded, fifty-five I think, came in that evening.

About four next morning we were off again,

but hardly any distance, first to Reumont, then Bertry, then Maurois, where we opened a dressing-station, and wounded were brought in immediately. These three villages were all by Le Cateau and that battle was being fought. Half an hour after noon came the second cold *douche* —our abrupt flight thence: and so, for many days, the great Retreat.

During a halt of several hours, on that first night, more wounded came in, and the horrible rain came with them: our camp was a bogged stubble-field.

By eight o'clock next morning we were in St. Quentin, where our wounded were "evacuated," handed over to a Clearing Hospital. By nine or so we were off again: in the afternoon, I think, the Germans arrived.

By Ozeley we came to Cugny, and at six next morning were off once more, reaching Noyon before noon. The Ancient had leave to stay behind for an hour, and so was able to see that glorious Cathedral, like some huge stone caravel, drifted down from the middle ages and moored to this; a stately ship of memories in a by-water of time, dozing in the dreamy yellow light. Once back from the main streets, full enough of troops, all the pleasant prosperous little city seemed asleep in peace. In a few hours the

Germans came to wake it, and have stayed on.

Over the Oise bridge the Ancient hurried after his unit, and got a lift. On a gun-carriage that had no gun a not very young officer was huddled, trying not to sleep (for seventy-six hours, I think he said, he had had no sleep), and he was trying to hold the bridle of his horse that came stumbling after him, also trying not to sleep. Which looked weariest ?

The officer opened heavy eyes, smiled at the dusty Ancient, and patted the place beside him: and fell asleep again. So the Ancient scrambled up, and took the horse's bridle, and his host lurched against him, and found a pillow on his shoulder.

Not far over the bridge, beyond Pontoise village, was the unit, camped in a field by the flat road; behind were scrubby plantations, to the right a wood. A pleasant place; and pleasant things happened there—the first bath, and the first letters. Only a fortnight without any word from home, and it seemed a generation. At six on Saturday evening began a four-mile march (that lasted five hours) to Charlespont. Then, three hours' sleep at the top of the ditch by the roadside, and at half-past two off again. It was Sunday, but our march did not end at

Coutroy till it was too late for Mass: however, we had a service in the village church, whence the Curé had gone to serve in the war. That was the first of many times that we used a French church, and very homely it seemed: no Catholic is ever a foreigner or "abroad" within the walls of one of his own churches.

In a lovely morning very early we left Coutroy village, and had a long march through splendid country, often like a vast park. Close by the exquisite, and exquisitely placed, fortress-palace of Pierrefonds we passed, shining like a Gargantuan pearl flung among emerald folds of forest and billowing field. Not a month before, the Ancient had been the guest of the Imperial lady who takes her travelling-title from it, and had listened to her wonderful talk. In the late afternoon we came to Crépy en Valois, marched through it, and camped in a field by the high road.

The Germans were following close, and next morning betimes we were for the road again. Through Nanteuil we came to Ognes, and camped on a breezy upland stubble, sloping down to green clumps of plantation. Before five next morning we were on the road to Montgé, and ended our march before afternoon.

The evening of the following day brought us

to Montpichet, where we had another cold *douche*—the news from Paris that the Government of the Republic had fled to Bordeaux. Was it 1840 over again? In 180 the French Government had not at first taken so far a flight. Was not this a more fateful omen?

From Montpichet we continued our retreat through Tournau, marching all night, to the Château de Monceaux, where we arrived in the early morning. It lies hard by the villages of Liverdy and Cagny: coming out of the church of the latter the Ancient found himself face to face with a friend and neighbor, an officer of artillery; and they sat among the tombs and compared notes.

"What division are you in?"

"Were you at Le Cateau? What was it like?"

We were ordered out of Monceaux at five next morning: but—oh, joy! not onwards: 'bout turn: the Retreat was over. The rest of our marches had the Germans in front.

They were wonderful days those of our retreat: of breathless interest, and, after the very first hour or two, singularly cheerful, in spite of all the *douches*. The men were always cheerful, unquestioning, confident. It was a big strategic movement—perhaps a decoy: *they*

didn't know. Anyway, it was all right; and the marches were packed with interest: the road always worth seeing. The troops of the Retreat saw much more of France than those who came afterwards, and our men like to be moving and seeing things.

Of course we saw no papers: we had no news: our talk was all *inter-unit:* we never knew what other Army Corps, other Divisions, even other Brigades, were doing. Some of us never knew what we were doing ourselves: never knew where we were marching, or, very clearly, in what direction. The maps some of us had were sectional, and showed only the day's march, or less. When we were nearest Paris some of us hardly knew we were near it at all: thousands of us, I suspect, had no idea that the Germans were following hot-foot on our rear: most, so far as numbers went, had no notion, as I believe, that we were being pushed.

But when the turn came we soon learned that we had turned: every hour brought us on new traces of the enemy, who had been where we now were, and was gone. We heard of him in every village, and saw mementoes of his passage everywhere. He was close in front: had been here yesterday, last night, this morning. We had not re-taken the old road. We had come all

the long way from Mont and Belgium: it was to the Marne we were hastening. Before we reached Saacy, and crossed it, we began to have German soldiers among our wounded: soon we began to see German dead lying on the ditch-heads, and among the underwood, by the road-side. Before we crossed the Marne, I say, at Saacy and Mery, when we went out at night (as as Charmesneuil) wounded-hunting, we found German soldiers, dead, dying, stricken: half-afraid, as it seemed to me, these living, to be found.

We saw large batches of German prisoners, unwounded. Our low-tide was passed.

Then came the Marne, and its counter-tide: which was in fact the first announcement of the ultimate decision of the war. But, during the actual battle, did we who were in it understand it and its final significance? Certainly one of us did not. That the complexion of the war's harsh face was changed, that we knew. That Paris was saved we knew very soon. That this time the *sang impur* was not to stain the breast of Lutetia herself.

The Germans in front must now be moving in hot haste: they left other things than wounded behind in the ditches and fields, quantities of arms and equipment, waggons full of clothing,

blankets, food, and boots. Odd things some of them had made off with, and now abandoned—among others the Ancient saw a bulky, highly unportable, standing stereoscope fitted with hundreds of beautiful slides on ground-glass, arranged on an "endless band": it was strange to look through the twin eye-holes and see Roman streets and churches, St. Peter's, the Forum, the Palatine; Tivoli and the temple of Vesta; Naples and the Toledo; Marseilles and the Cannebière; Mont Cervin and Mont Blanc; Coppet and Mme. de Stael's Villa—a hundred well-remembered places. Somebody meant it for the pride (and shame) of a Teuton home, and somebody had had a slip "twixt cup and lip."

Among other things there were scores and scores of pale, sallow blue great-coats, and some of them one of us gave to our German prisoners to wrap themselves withal against the cold rain.

By Courcelles and Gandeloup we came to Chézy-en-Ormois: next day, through savage rain, to Billy-en-Orques, which the enemy had hurried through a few hours earlier. On the morrow by St. Rémy and Hartennes to Chacrise—and now the Aisne region was reached, and the long Aisne battle begun. From Chacrise, to Serches: close to, but hidden from, the Aisne. For a fortnight, on the plateau called Monte de

Soissons. The fortnight seemed an autumn: and it seemed as if we were to be always there: but quite suddenly we were for the road again. And there came the third period of daily marchings—only they were nightly. Every night we marched; through tall and eerie forests, through mist, through thick moonless darkness, through exquisite moonlit midnights, through nights of clear cold and frost and stars. By day we rested and kept cover: and cross-ways the French were moving to take our place upon the Aisne; we were hastening with

> ". . . unperturbed chase,
> Deliberate speed, majestic instancy"

north; to stand in the way of the Gates of Calais.

No fear of confusing the memories of those marches with the first: all was different. The first hang always in a harvest-glow of cloudless heat, dust, brazen light. The last in a strange night-silence, mist-wrapped, or in a cold splendour of frost and moon: thus; Mont de Soissons to Droizy, a short march, through fields of frozen fog. Droizy to Longpoint—arriving with a sort of stage moon silvering an enormous pile of stage ruins, too splendid to seem true. Longpont to Lieu Restauré, and another abby, not at all *restauré*. To Béthisy St. Martin. To Le

Meux; and there entrained. A long night of horrible cold in a train unwarmed, with broken windows, and relentless frost outside. At Pont Rémy detrained, and day-marches resumed, plenty of them, enough to see us into French Flanders, and over the frontier into Flanders of Belgium. And so winter, and the ending of that first stage of the war.

It would take a book to describe that first stage in its mere itinerary, without expanding into episode—such wayside episodes as make this book up. Books have been already written about it; but mostly, I suppose, real war-books, by men qualified to write such; this one, as was said long ago at its outset, makes no claim to be of that sort. It sets down little things, leaving the big things to other writers able to treat of them: its appeal is not to the war-student, but to simple folk like the writer, who may care to hear of other simple folk who came his way, met him, and passed on, on the high-way of the war —with whom, living or dead, be Peace.

PRINTED BY BRAUNWORTH & CO., BROOKLYN, N. Y.

823 3781
B5f Bickerstaffe-Drew, Francis
French Windows

	DATE DUE		

Christian Brothers College Library